JUXTAPOSITION AND THE ELISHA CYCLE

RACHELLE GILMOUR

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To my father, David Gilmour

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Part A

Introduction to the Juxtaposition of Narrative

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Juxtaposition is an important feature in many types of art forms: the placement of colours in a painting, poems in a collection, frames in a comic strip, scenes in a film, or chapters in a novel. Two elements in spatial or temporal contiguity will inevitably influence how each is perceived by the audience, but juxtaposition can also be a deliberate device exploited by the artist for a particular aesthetic or interpretive effect. Everything is placed next to something else, and this composition is an essential part of the art.

This principle can be observed in the juxtaposition of stories, episodes, and scenes in biblical narrative. It was used by both authors and editors of the Bible to instil meaning in the narrative and to shape the audiences' interpretation of it. An understanding of the dynamics of juxtaposition in the final form of the biblical narrative is an essential modern hermeneutical tool. Although it is widely *known* as a feature of biblical narrative and assumed as a hermeneutical method within biblical studies, there has been surprisingly little systematic study of its function, mechanics, or significance. Its centrality to the *poetics* of biblical narrative necessitates a deeper analysis of the different types of juxtaposition, how to recognise them, how precisely they affect the interpretation, and how a reader can observe these effects. Such analysis will lead to more insightful readings and interpretation of the biblical narrative.

To this end, the present study will take a synchronic approach to observing and analysing the use of juxtaposition in biblical narrative. We will look at the theory of how juxtaposed narratives dialogue and how we can be competent at interpreting juxtaposed units in biblical narrative. We will propose that the biblical authors and editors deliberately used juxtaposition to shape the meaning of their narrative and that there are many indicators in the text for how they intended the interpretation to be affected. Furthermore, we will demonstrate that juxtaposed narrative units are important to the interpretation of every episode and

story in the biblical narrative, not only a few cases where commentators have already realised the potential for adjacent episodes to fill gaps in the story.

After establishing a theoretical basis, this study will focus upon the Elisha cycle as a case study. Each episode of the cycle will be examined independently and then re-examined in light of its juxtaposed episodes. The difference between the two interpretations will highlight the significance of the effect of juxtaposition. The Elisha stories are particularly appropriate as a case study because they do not follow a clear chronological order and their arrangement is to some degree arbitrary. The fresh literary and exegetical insights emerging from the application of this theory to the Elisha cycle will demonstrate the theory's validity and justify our extensive exploration of this narrative feature.

Juxtaposition is the work of editors as well as authors, and an awareness of diachronic studies will forge a useful and original direction for our literary analysis. It will enhance our synchronic approach because it gives us a further point for comparison in our case study on the Elisha cycle. By speculating about the order of the stories before they reached their final form, we can observe how the interpretation changed when the arrangement of the stories changed. Our results will be only tentative, but they will provide a useful point of comparison and help us to see juxtaposition as an editorial process, not just a feature in the final form of biblical narrative.

Chapter 2

Previous Approaches to Juxtaposition

1. *Episodic Narrative and Different Types of Narrative Units*

The biblical narrative from Genesis to 2 Kings is not a single story; rather, it is composed of many different narrative units. First, it comprises a series of stories interspersed with other genres, such as laws, lists, and poetry. Each of these stories usually focuses upon a main hero and his family, or else a specific generation of Israel. There is an overarching plot for each story, which is shaped by the course of the hero's life and which contributes in some way to the national, legal, or political development of Israel. For example, the story of Abraham in Gen 12:1–25:18 follows the narrative arc of his personal dramas and simultaneously narrates the development of God's promises of land and nationhood to his descendants. The story of Samson in Judg 13–16 begins at his birth, ends with his death, and charts his interactions with the Philistines, who are an increasing threat to Israel.

Often these stories are well defined, beginning with an opening formula introducing the subject (e.g. in Gen 25:19, ואלה תולדת יצחק בן־אברהם, "And these are the generations of Isaac, son of Abraham"). Some formulae are specific to the book in which they appear. For example, in Judges there is a repeated formula introducing the sin of Israel followed by the story of a new judge to rescue it. In Kings there is a formula stating the period of the king's reign and other summary information to introduce the story of that king. In other sections of the biblical narrative the individual stories are not so well defined, and they overlap or merge into one another. For example, the story of the prophet Samuel in 1 Sam 1–12 contains the story of the ark among the Philistines in 4:1–7:1 and overlaps with the story of Saul from ch. 9 onwards.

In turn, stories are made up of smaller units. Each story consists of a string of episodes that usually have their own dramatic tension and resolution, or beginning and end, contributing to the overall storyline in some way. The story of Abraham is not just one continuous story but a

series of smaller episodes, such as the testing of Abraham in Gen 22:1–19 or the sojourn of Sarai and Abram in Egypt in Gen 12:10–20. Together they develop the different themes of the story and contribute to the overall narrative arc. In the testing of Abraham, there is a dramatic tension established when God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and resolution is reached at the end of the episode when God reiterates his promises to Abraham. Sometimes there is no dramatic tension, but rather a speech (e.g. Gen 15) or a summary of information (e.g. Gen 22:20–24) will delimit an episode. Often the new episode will begin with a new character, new location, or new setting in time to identify a fresh beginning or to link with the closure of the previous episode. Episodes are usually the smallest unit where the plot can exist independently: they are often related to the surrounding story and rely on other episodes for their causation or background information, but they have their own beginning and ending, giving them some level of independence.

Episodes, in turn, can sometimes be broken up into smaller units: scenes. Usually scenes will be dependent on one another for a beginning, dramatic tension, and ending in the plot but will be separated by a shift in time, space, or characters. Sometimes it is relatively easy to define stories, episodes, and scenes. Such is the case in the Elisha cycle, which we will be examining in detail. The cycle is a story in 2 Kgs 2:1–8:15 (although even these limits are not entirely well defined). It can be broken up into independent episodes (e.g. the episode of the Shunammite woman in 2 Kgs 4:8–37), and some of these episodes can in turn be broken up into scenes (e.g. 4:8–17 and 4:18–37). Other sub-divisions are much harder to determine, such as Jacob's journey from Laban to Esau in Gen 32. Is this one episode comprising a number of scenes (e.g. vv. 1–21, 22–32, and so on), itself a scene in Jacob's journey to and from Laban, or is each section (i.e. vv. 1–21, 22–32) itself an episode? Not all sections in biblical narrative conform neatly to this terminology of stories, episodes, and scenes, and, when we use these terms in this study, we must remember the units are not always clearly delimited in the text. Regardless of the precise terminology used, biblical narrative can be divided up into smaller narrative units. Some are dependent on others for the beginning and ending of their plot (usually scenes); others have an independent plot but are dependent on the surrounding narrative for background information (episodes); and others are independent sections of narrative (stories). Although our terminology is an artificial construct, it is useful for talking about this complex phenomenon.

The episodic nature of biblical narrative creates a whole series of beginnings and endings, gaps in time, and shifts in subject, and these affect the audience's interpretation of the individual episodes and stories

within the narrative as a whole. Stories and episodes function like acts and scenes where the curtain closes or the lights go out between each systematic disclosure of the story. The gaps between each fragment of story contribute to the meaning through their silence and implication. Furthermore, the relative independence of each story, and often independence of the episodes within them, gave flexibility to the editors in their arrangement of them. This flexibility was made greater by the possibility of non-chronological storytelling techniques.

The obvious concomitant to the episodic nature of biblical narrative is that each of the stories and episodes is necessarily juxtaposed with another story or episode. We propose in this study that these juxtapositions evoke meaning in the text. How does this happen, and is this a particular interpretive device of the biblical editors? We will survey previous approaches to the arrangement of episodes in biblical narrative and then analyse: first, the effect of different types of juxtaposition; secondly, how the text alerts us to this juxtaposition; and finally how attention to juxtaposition enhances our reading and interpretation of the narrative.

2. *Literary History*

Investigations into the sources and traditions incorporated into biblical narrative have provided many explanations for how, and sometimes why, certain stories and episodes of narrative are juxtaposed. In some cases, there are groups of episodes that together form a coherent storyline, have a continuous chain of narrative causality, and have consistency of ideological viewpoint. These sections suggest the hand of a single author or group of authors who created a cohesive and expansive account that was appropriated by the editors of the biblical books. An example of such a stretch of narrative is in 2 Sam 9 to 1 Kgs 2, commonly known as the Succession Narrative. Although there is rarely complete consensus on reconstructions of the Bible's literary history, Rost's proposal that this section comes from a single source[1] has largely been accepted in scholarship, albeit with significant variations of start and end points and differing ideas about the purpose of the original document. In such cases as these, each of the episodes within the section of narrative is juxtaposed because they are kept within their original position. They develop a continuous storyline, and so the original progressive causality between each episode has been preserved.

1. Developed in Leonard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David* (trans. M. D. Rutter and D. M. Gunn; Sheffield: Almond, 1982).

In other stretches of unified composition, the editor has chosen to interrupt the storyline with an episode deriving from another tradition. For example, the Joseph cycle in Gen 37–50 is interrupted by the narrative of Judah and Tamar in Gen 38. This is not only suggested by the break in narrative causality but also by the note in 37:36 about Joseph entering the house of Potiphar, which is discontinued and then resumed in 39:1. It is thought that, at the very least, the Joseph stories in ch. 37 and chs. 39–45, along with parts of chs. 46–50, form a unity attributed to P. The story of Judah and Tamar was inserted by the Yahwist, who found the episode in tradition and used it to transform the section into a Jacob cycle.[2]

There are also stretches of narrative that were composed from a number of different traditions but have been reworked by an editor with a particular ideological viewpoint. For example, many scholars consider 1 Sam 8–12 to be a collection of pro- and anti-monarchy sources that have been brought together to describe the accession of Saul to the throne and the institution of the monarchy in Israel.[3] In this case, a number of traditions have been placed in juxtaposition that all relate to this one theme but contain considerable overlap of material, for example, the multiple designations of Saul as king.

Finally, source-critical theories have addressed the juxtaposition of whole stories within an extended narrative. Often this juxtaposition has an obvious motivation—the stories about the patriarchs are grouped together in their generational order, as are the kings of Israel. However, the chronological order of the Judges has been questioned due to inconsistencies, suggesting the order was either not known, invented, or

2. E.g. George W. Coats, "Redactional Unity in Genesis 37–50," *JBL* 93 (1974): 15–21. Cf. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37–50: A Commentary* (trans. J. J. Scullion; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986), 24. Based on Gressman, Westermann argues that even this section is a combination of a family narrative (ch. 37), which was joined to a political narrative (chs. 39–45).

3. Beginning with Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (trans. J. Sutherland Black and A. Menzies; Gloucester, Mass.: Smith, 1957), 253–55. He proposed that 1 Sam 9:1–10:16 and ch. 11 were in favour of the monarchy and so therefore should be dated to an early period when the monarchy was still popular. First Samuel chs. 7 and 8; 10:17–27, and ch. 12 were opposed to the monarchy and were written in a later period when Israel no longer had a king and theocracy was idealised. For an overview of the many revisions of this theory since Wellhausen, see V. Philips Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence* (SBLDS 118; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 176–80.

not a concern for the editors.[4] The stories from Deuteronomy to the end of 2 Kings as a whole are thought to have been appropriated and edited by the Deuteronomist in order to propound Deuteronomic theology.[5]

The literary history of a book can explain where different sources came from, their relationship to each other, and even who juxtaposed the different episodes. However, it does not always explain why the editor has patterned the episodes in a particular way. Why does the story of Judah and Tamar interrupt the Joseph story between chs. 37 and 38, or why has the editor of Samuel placed the pericopes in their present order? To a certain extent, it is possible that pericopes and stories have been juxtaposed merely because they have similar subject matter or they were the only sources available to the editor. However, this response is not entirely satisfactory. Editorial links and patterns within biblical narrative suggest that the editors have used what was available with purpose. The editors have sought links between the juxtaposed narratives and used insertions and existing details of the text to explicate these links to the reader. Furthermore, strings of episodes coming from single sources exhibit patterning and deliberate ordering that is analogous to editorial positioning of episodes. There are certain principles in the arrangements that were used both by single authors and by editors in Hebrew narrative.

An understanding of the literary history of certain sections of narrative can help us probe deeper into the significance of the juxtaposition of stories and episodes. In many cases an editor has used older traditions, added to them, and reshaped them in order to expound a particular ideology. Notably, the Deuteronomic insertions of speeches and prayers at

4. Robert G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (AB 6; Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 23; Trent C. Butler, *Judges* (WBC 8; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 59–61. See also Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (trans. J. Chipman; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 35–45, 54–56. Amit demonstrates how the cyclical pattern of the judges and pairs of salvation stories shape the order of episodes in the book. Regardless of whether this is the chronological order, it conveys the book's theological message as a literary presentation. Amit writes (p. 45), "But while the sequence of cycles is a situational characteristic of the narrated world, there seems no doubt that the rhetorical effect on the reader has advantages and takes preference over that created among those experiencing it in the narrated world. In reality generations pass away, and the effect of experience is dissipated over a period of seemingly more than four hundred years, while one who reads the book with historical perspective can follow all seven cycles one after another." Thus, to some extent, even a chronological organisation is artificial.

5. Originally formulated in Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (2d ed.; JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981). Noth argues that it was an explanation for the fall of Jerusalem.

key moments of Israel's history emphasise the Deuteronomic theology in these narratives. Noth believed the book of Joshua was an existing account of separate aetiological stories to which the Deuteronomist added an introduction, epilogue, and some other supplementary material. For example, the introduction in Josh 1 addresses the immediate task of conquering the promised land, the extent of the land, and Israel's unity in this conquest.[6] Similarly, by integrating pro- and anti-monarchy sources in 1 Sam 8–12, the resulting narrative is a nuanced but more ambiguous assessment of Saul and the new monarchy. Juxtaposed stories or episodes with different ideologies reinterpret one another to create a new ideology.

This principle is demonstrated by differences between the LXX and MT versions. In 1 Kgs 6–7, the MT orders the pericopes with 6:1–10 and 6:14–38 about the temple, 7:1–12 about the palace, and 7:13–51 about the temple. In the LXX, the third and fourth pericopes in 7:1–12 and 7:13–51 are in reverse order so that all the plans for the temple are grouped together. This arrangement, along with a number of other discrepancies in chronology in individual verses, has given rise to the suggestion that the editors of the LXX (or LXX *Vorlage*) wanted to imply Solomon finished building the temple before he began on his own house, thus making him appear more pious.[7] The principle of rearranging pericopes to change their interpretation was at work in these early versions.

These examples demonstrate that the introduction of new episodes to a book by its editors has the potential to change the interpretation of the narrative as a whole. In turn, the interpretation of the individual episode changes in its new context.

3. *Synchronic Approaches*

Synchronic approaches have also paid attention to the juxtaposition of particular episodes in biblical narrative. Such approaches demonstrate the aesthetic effect of juxtaposition and its advantages for storytelling. Garsiel's study on 1 Samuel focuses on comparative structures in the narrative and demonstrates that these can be created through the juxtaposition of certain episodes. Particularly where there are no plot or thematic

6. Ibid., 61–62.

7. See David W. Gooding, "Pedantic Timetabling in 3rd Book of Reigns," *VT* 15 (1965): 154–57. Simon J. DeVries, *I Kings* (WBC 12; Waco: Word, 1985), 90, also considers the MT arrangement to be earlier. Cf. Julio Trebolle, "Redaction, Recension, and Midrash in the Books of Kings," *BIOSCS* 15 (1982): 24–28, argues the LXX arrangement is earlier.

links, the reader is encouraged to look for other similarities in the subject matter, such as content, motifs, the characters' situation, or the general background.[8] He demonstrates the effect of juxtaposition, for example, in the insertion of 1 Sam 25 between chs. 24 and 26, with which it does not have a direct connection in plot. There is an analogy between Nabal in ch. 25 and Saul in the surrounding chapters, created by many situational parallels. These include the lack of support from their families, the royal imagery used to describe Nabal, and the threat that the Lord will smite them.[9] Garsiel argues that comparison is key to conveying meaning in narrative and that such comparison is created by juxtaposition.

Sternberg also examines juxtaposition, and he discerns the literary effect of creating gaps in the narrative that the reader must fill. He refers primarily to ideological tensions within pericopes, but the principle can be applied to tensions between juxtaposed pericopes.[10] Alter similarly looks at tensions between juxtaposed narratives and explains how such sequences can be complementary rather than contradictory. For example, in the two creation narratives of humans in Gen 1 and 2, Alter argues that the "author's subject matter was too complex for linear expression and, therefore, he has employed two accounts to generate a tension of views."[11]

These literary studies focus almost exclusively on juxtapositions where the episodes are somehow discordant with each other, creating a tendency in modern readers not to appreciate the aesthetic or interpretive advantage of the patterning. They demonstrate that there are types of continuity apart from plot and that tensions in ideology can be smoothed out. Most of these synchronic approaches recognise that there is a diachronic explanation for the discontinuity, even though they do not explore the direct relationship between the editor's reason for the patterning and the resulting literary art.[12] Overall, these studies have been valuable for understanding how discordance can create meaning.

8. Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Ramat-Gan: Revivim, 1985), 21–22.

9. Ibid., 129.

10. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 242–47.

11. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), 141–46. According to Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 243, tension between accounts can also deliberately produce irony.

12. E.g. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 131–54; Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel*, 34.

These two approaches, diachronic and synchronic, only partially account for the overall patterning of narrative units in biblical narrative. Diachronic studies suggest that an editor juxtaposed different narrative units as they were available. However, they do not explain why a particular order was chosen when many were possible, nor do they explain the arrangement of episodes written by a single author. In literary studies, attention to the intentional juxtaposition of particular episodes is viewed more as an exception when no other sense for a pericope is possible, rather than as a norm for interpretation.

One recent study drawing these two ideas together is that of Marais, *Representation in Old Testament Texts*. After developing a theory of "representation" in Old Testament narrative, he proposes that narrative juxtaposition is a central literary convention in the book of Judges and probably also other Old Testament texts. He writes,

> In my view, the perspectival mode of representation implies that scenes or stories are not primarily told to complete a whole, to support a holistic representation, but to add a perspective, or to bring a perspective into relief. The perspectival nature of Old Testament narrative undermines the notion of a simplistic view on reality, causality and linear chronology.[13]

Importantly, Marais proposes not only that juxtaposition is a feature in the text but that it was a "mode of representation," a convention by which texts were created.[14] Thus this concept governed the creation of the whole text—it is not only a way of explaining discordances or describing the final literary product. This is an idea we will build upon in our study, showing why it is foundational for the interpretation of biblical narrative. On the other hand, Marais sees juxtaposition as being the alternative to causal and chronological relations between narratives,[15] whereas this study will show that a theory of juxtaposition can incorporate both chronological/causal and non-chronological arrangements. Furthermore, while recognising other types of logical relationships between episodes, such as complementarity or congruence, Marais focuses on paradox; we, however, shall expand our interest to all types of relationship.

A look at the rabbinical and inner-biblical tradition suggests that literary attention to surrounding narrative units ought to be the norm rather than the exception for understanding individual episodes and stories. Furthermore, it suggests that it was a deliberate and widespread convention for the creation of the biblical texts.

13. Jacobus Marais, *Representation in Old Testament Narrative Texts* (BIS 36; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 61.
14. Ibid., 63.
15. Ibid., 153.

4. *The Rabbis*

In the rabbinical literature, attention to the juxtaposition of narrative units is used as a key to interpretation.[16] It is commonly called *semukhin* or *smikhut parshiot* and is described by Arnold Goldberg: "The general proposition…is the assumption that there exists a meaningful relation between the verse and the pericopes in Revealed Scripture. This relation can be formulated as a proposition: lemma B succeeds lemma A (or precedes lemma C), because God wanted to say something by this."[17] The principle of looking at what surrounds a difficult passage is stated explicitly for Halakhic interpretation in the seven rules of Hillel and the thirteen *middot* of R. Ishmael.[18] Although it does not appear in the 32 *middot* traditionally attributed to Eliezer ben Yose ha-Galil specifically addressing aggadic literature, there are a number of explicit references to this hermeneutic method in the Aggada. For example, in Sifre Numbers, *Balak*: "Every pericope which is found near another (*smukha*) may be interpreted with respect to it." In the Babylonian Talmud *Moed Qatan* 28a: "R. Ammi said, Why has the death of Miryam (Num 20,1) been joined (*nismekha*) to the parasha of the red Heifer (Num, chpt. 19)? In order to tell you, as the red heifer atones so the death of the righteous atones…"[19]

16. For a full-length study on the concept of juxtaposition in Rabbinical and medieval Jewish commentaries, see Isaac B. Gottlieb, *Order in the Bible: The Arrangement of the Torah in Rabbinic and Medieval Jewish Commentary* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2009 [Hebrew]).

17. Arnold Goldberg, "The *SEMIKHA*—A Compositional Form of the Rabbinic Homily," in *Proceedings of the 9th World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, Aug 1985* (ed. H. Weiss and R. P. Margolin; Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 2.

18. Rule 7 in the seven rules of Hillel and rule 12 in the rules of Ishmael (which are thought to be modeled upon the rules of Hillel) (Hermann L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* [trans. M. Bockmuehl; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 23, 24). Note that these rules were usually drawn up for polemical or apologetic reasons to justify practice rather than to proscribe it (e.g. Hillel's rules appear to have arisen in the context of whether to sacrifice the passover lamb on Shabbat). See Saul Lieberman, "Rabbinic Interpretation of Scripture," in *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Literary Transmission, Beliefs and Manners of Palestine in the I Century BCE–IV Century CE* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), 54; and David Stern, "Midrash," in *20th Century Jewish Religious Thought* (ed. A. A. Cohen and P. Mendes-Flohr; Philadelphia: JPS, 2009), 614–15.

19. Quote taken from Goldberg, "The *SEMIKHA*," 2.

Alongside explicit references, juxtaposition is an interpretive tool used in practice in midrashic interpretations. Often the question "what is written above this thing?" introduces the interpretation by juxtaposition (e.g. in Deut 20:1 and 19:18 in *Tanhuma Shoftim* §15).[20] In other cases, the interpretation is given without the explicit mention of the principle. In the *b. Shab.* 55b, the placement of the story of Reuben and his father's concubine Bilhah between Rachel's death and the list of Jacob's twelve sons is understood: "He (Reuben) resented his mother's (Leah's) humiliation. Said he, if my mother's sister (Rachel) was a rival to my mother, shall the bond-maid of my mother's sister (Bilhah) be a rival to my mother? Thereupon he arose and did what he did."[21] Also, a third verse can be used to link the passages. For example, in *Gen. Rab.* 58:2, Eccl 1:5 is used to link Gen 22:20–23 and Gen 23:1. Rebekah's birth is recorded immediately before Sarah's death, and thus she is the sun that rises as Sarah's sun sets, one event causing the other.[22] Sometimes a link is made through an aggadic story such as between the testing of Abraham in Gen 22 and the death of Sarah. *Tanhuma Wayyera* 23:29 tells the story of Sarah dying after Satan, in the guise of Isaac, and relates what happened on Mount Moriah.[23] The same interpretation based on juxtaposition, but without the story, is found on this verse in Rashi, who suggests that Sarah died of shock after the binding of Isaac.

Frequently the interpretations themselves do not accord with a modern understanding of the biblical writers' intention. For example, *Gen. Rab.* 15:7 on the juxtaposition of Gen 2:25 and 3:1 concludes that the serpent tempted Eve (3:1) because it had seen her and Adam (2:25) and therefore desired Eve for himself.[24] Nevertheless, this practice of the rabbis, who were closer in time and culture to the biblical writers and the recipients

20. Ibid., 4.

21. Quoted in Avigdor Shinan and Yair Zakovitch, "Midrash on Scripture and Midrash within Scripture," in *Studies in Bible* (ed. S. Japhet; ScrHier 31; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 269.

22. Discussed in Lieve M. Teugels, "Gap Filling and Linkage in the Midrash on the Rebekah Cycle," in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History* (ed. A. Wenin; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 596–97.

23. Ibid., 597–98. A similar story is also in *Midrash Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer*, ch. 38 and quoted in Yair Zakovitch, "Juxtaposition in the Abraham Cycle," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. D. P. Wright, D. N. Freedman, and A. Hurvitz; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 522.

24. This interpretation by juxtaposition is discussed in Susan A. Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 68–69.

of a tradition of biblical interpretation, suggests the validity of this method of interpretation, even if the interpretations themselves are questionable.[25]

5. *Inner-biblical Interpretation*

Finally, there is evidence that the biblical editors themselves were aware of the interpretive possibilities of juxtaposition and exploited it for midrashic interpretation of narrative units within the Bible.[26] Fishbane examines the recontextualisation of material from Kings in the book of Chronicles and shows how rearrangement of the material produced new interpretations of events. He terms this "aggadic exegesis," suggesting that it was a conscious hermeneutical principle on the part of the Chronicler, resembling the later rabbinic exegetical practice.[27]

First, Fishbane offers evidence of the Bible interpreting earlier biblical literature in this way. The Chronicler(s) used this type of interpretation to understand their source in 1 Kgs 14:22–28, which is reformulated in 2 Chr 12. In this case, the Chronicler(s) have interpreted the juxtaposition of the sin of the Judeans with the invasion of Pharaoh Shishak as implying a causal relationship. Alongside introducing Rehoboam's sin into the narrative, 2 Chr 12:2b makes more explicit than the account in Kings that covenant infidelity was the cause of the invasion.[28]

In addition to Fishbane's examples in Chronicles, there are traces of this type of interpretation in Genesis to 2 Kings. Numbers 24 concludes the story of Balaam and Balak, and it is juxtaposed in Num 25 with the

25. Zakovitch, "Juxtaposition," 510.

26. Against calling exegetical material in the Bible "midrash," see Esther Menn, "Inner-Biblical Exegesis in the Tanak," in *A History of Biblical Interpretation* (ed. A. J. Hauser and D. F. Watson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 75. This is on the basis that there is a clear distinction in Rabbinic texts between biblical material itself and the commentary on it. On the other hand, the term is helpful because it expresses the new interpretation that arises for a new context of readers (see what follows here and in Yair Zakovitch, *Inner-biblical and Extra-biblical Midrash and the Relationship between Them* [Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2009 (Hebrew)], 15–20).

27. M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 399–400.

28. Ibid., 400–401. Another example of inner-biblical interpretation of juxtaposition in the books of Chronicles includes the account of Hezekiah's illness in 2 Chr 32. This interprets the juxtaposition of Hezekiah's illness and miraculous recovery with the visit of the Babylonian delegation in 2 Kgs 20 as being causally linked (described in Shinan and Zakovitch, "Midrash on Scripture," 268–69, and Zakovitch, *Inner-biblical and Extra-biblical Midrash*, 95–96).

Israelites profaning themselves with Moabite women. Although there is no explicit connection in the narrative, Num 31:16 interprets a role for Balaam in Israel's sin with the Moabite women, "These women here, on Balaam's advice, made the Israelites act treacherously against the Lord in the affair of Peor, so that the plague came among the congregation of the Lord."[29] Another example can be found in Exodus where the question in 17:7, "Is the Lord among us or not?," is juxtaposed with the war between Israel and the Amalekites. Deuteronomy 25:17–18 interprets a link between the question and the war, and suggests that the war occurred as a punishment because Israel did not fear God, "Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way, when you were faint and weary, and struck down all who lagged behind you and did not fear God."[30]

Attention to juxtaposition as an aid for interpretation can be found in a number of texts linking the biblical period to the rabbinic period. The book of *Jubilees* pays attention to juxtaposition in its retelling of Gen 25:29–34 and Gen 26 in *Jub*. 24:2–3.[31] Pseudo-Philo also interprets the juxtaposition of Num 24 and 25 mentioned above and supplies an additional story to link them.[32] Thus there is evidence to suggest that the attention to juxtaposition found in the rabbinic period was also important in the biblical period.

Secondly, there is evidence of the Chronicler changing the order of pericopes in Kings in order to change the interpretation to fit the book's ideology. For example, the treaty between Jehoshaphat and Israel is immediately juxtaposed with the destruction of their fleet in 2 Chr 20:35–37 but not in the parallel texts in 1 Kgs 22:44 and 48. The arrangement in 2 Chr 20 suggests that the events were causally related, and it gives a supernatural explanation not observable in 1 Kgs 22.[33] This method of repatterning episodes to change the interpretation is observable in other Jewish literature until the time of the Rabbis. For example, the episodes of 1 Macc. 1 and 2 are juxtaposed so that the futile deaths of the martyrs

29. Yair Zakovitch, *"And You Shall Tell Your Son…": The Concept of the Exodus in the Bible* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 118–19. Translations where the Hebrew is not quoted are taken from the NRSV. Translations of quoted Hebrew are my own.

30. Ibid., 119–21. He justifies the translation that it was the Israelites who did not fear God, rather than Amalek: this was the understanding of the Masoretes, and a change of subject does not make sense.

31. Observed in Shinan and Zakovitch, "Midrash on Scripture," 268.

32. Discussed in Zakovitch, *Concept of the Exodus*, 119.

33. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 401–3.

are contrasted with the introduction of Mattathias and the positive success of the Hasmonean rebels. Josephus, using Maccabees as his source,[34] inserts another account of the capitulation of the Samaritans between these narratives in *Ant.* 12.5.5 so that the interpretation is altered. Now both the martyrs and the Hasmoneans are depicted positively by contrast with the Samaritans in the account placed between them.[35] Finally, meaningful juxtaposition is also an important aspect of the arrangement of the Mishnah and Talmud aggadic material.[36] The careful placement of narratives alongside each other was used to control their interpretation from Chronicles through to the rabbinic period.

In light of this, the concept of juxtaposition as described and illustrated in rabbinic literature can be extended to the juxtaposition of passages where we do not have prior sources, such as the majority of the narrative in Genesis to the end of Kings. Along this line of argument, Shinan and Zakovitch write: "Stepping back into still earlier strata of the Bible, it becomes more difficult to prove this technique. We can, however, sense the redactor's awareness that he is able to express his own ideas through the juxtaposition of texts and thereby imbue previously independent units with new significance."[37] In another article, Zakovitch demonstrates the additional levels of interpretation when attention is paid to juxtaposition in the Abraham narratives. For example, reading Gen 14 and 15 together, and then Gen 20 and 21 together, generates the principle that God will reward the righteous. The juxtaposition of chs. 15 and 16 criticises Abraham and Sarah because Abraham agrees to take Hagar immediately after God has made a covenant that he will have many descendants, suggesting a lack of faith.[38] Juxtaposition as a form of inner-biblical interpretation is testified by the fact that new and different interpretations can be discovered depending on whether you read a narrative unit in isolation or in context.

This understanding of juxtaposition raises two important points. First, the meaning of a narrative unit can be altered depending on the surrounding pericopes, and this process was evidently used by the editors of the

34. Bezalel Bar-Kochva, *Judas Maccabaeus: The Jewish Struggle Against the Seleucids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 190–91.

35. Thank you to Professor Daniel Schwartz of the Hebrew University for suggesting this example.

36. For example, on the Babylonian Talmud, see Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 266–67.

37. Shinan and Zakovitch, "Midrash on Scripture," 269.

38. Zakovitch, "Juxtaposition," 513–17.

biblical narrative. The placement of pericopes and stories was itself an act of interpretation of the meaning of the events, and therefore it is an appropriate method for our reading of the text also. This emphasis on interpretation reflects our conclusions from historical critical studies that the patterning of narrative units from diverse sources could alter and create ideology in the resulting narrative. An understanding of juxtaposition as the editor's own interpretation of the events explains why this process took place and why close attention ought to be paid to it. Secondly, this understanding points to the importance of juxtaposition in the interpretation of every narrative, not just those that create some sort of discordance in the narrative. While the interpretation of every passage may not change so markedly in context of its surrounding passages, it is an important principle for understanding. Attention to juxtaposition is not merely a method for explaining particular discontinuities in biblical narrative but is a principle of interpretation for all narrative.

Chapter 3

Interpreting Juxtaposed Narrative Units

When two things are placed next to each other, our tendency, and even hermeneutical imperative, is to find some sort of connection or meaning. This was illustrated by the rabbinical practice of interpreting laws, stories, and poems in light of the surrounding text, and the other approaches to juxtaposition in biblical narrative we surveyed earlier. The most common connection between sections of text is that they occur in chronological sequence, but in biblical narrative this cannot be always assumed. The last of the 32 principles of R. Eliezer ben R. Yose HaGelili is אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה ("there is no earlier or later in the Torah"). In other words, the events and laws in the Torah are not necessarily in chronological order.[1] This flexibility in the arrangement of materials, observed by the Rabbis, is the foundation for their interpretation by juxtaposition. Rather than being confined by a strict chronological sequence of events, the biblical editors could make choices about what events were placed beside each other. Thus there were two options for juxtaposing narrative units: either they were placed together because they were chronologically sequential, or because their themes or events commented upon each other in some other way.

These two types of juxtaposition could change the interpretation in very different ways, and each demands a different type of attention from the reader or audience to understand them. Let us first look at what these two types of interpretation are.

1. *Chronological Interpretation*

Chronological sequence is the simplest method of ordering narrative units.[2] However, it can be manipulated in order to shape the interpretation

1. See Yonatan Kolatch, *Masters of the Word*. Vol. 1, *Traditional Jewish Bible Commentary from the First Through Tenth Centuries* (Jersey City: KTAV, 2006), 108–11; Gottlieb, Order in the Bible, 3–9.

2. Cf. Marais, *Representation*, 153, argues that chronology is not the driving force behind the arrangement of the text in Judges, although it is more prominent in other books of the Bible. He contrasts chronological arrangement with juxtaposition,

of pericopes by selecting which episodes in the chronological sequence to include. Chronological sequences provide a specific relationship between two events, because the first can potentially provide the background or causation for the second, and the second can be influenced by, or be a consequence of, the first. In effect, chronological arrangement results in the creation of a "plot," in which the distinctive elements of meaning are the concepts of causation and consequences.[3]

a. *Causation and Other Background Information*

One effect of placing two narrative units next to each other in chronological order is that it can imply a causal connection between them. According to David Hume, there are three principles underlying the formation of causal impressions: (1) temporal priority of the cause *c* before the effect *e*, (2) temporal and spatial contiguity between *c* and *e*, and (3) constant conjunction between *c* and *e*.[4] The assumption of a causal connection without the third principle is the basis of the common logical fallacy, *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, but it is nevertheless a tendency of human nature that temporal and spatial contiguity will lead us to draw causal conclusions in everyday life. This tendency is exploited by narratives.[5] By placing two events in contiguity and establishing a chronological sequence between them, the reader is inclined to interpret the second event as a consequence of the first, especially if this is a causation that the reader is familiar with from life experience. Juxtaposition and the selectivity of narrative units by the editor is therefore very important because the reader's understanding of what caused each event will be influenced by the preceding unit.

but, as we will demonstrate, this in itself is a type of juxtaposition that has much in common with non-chronological arrangement. Furthermore, he rightly argues against imposing Western causal logic on biblical texts (p. 67), suggesting instead that the interpreter look for other relationships between the adjacent texts. However, as demonstrated in my earlier study, *Representing the Past: A Literary Analysis of Narrative Historiography in the Book of Samuel* (VTSup 143; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 41–89, while causation in biblical narrative works along different principles to modern literature, it is still an important logical relation between narratives. Thus by recognising this, we can expand Marais' study on types of juxtaposition.

3. However, note that "plot" can also be created without chronological arrangement, but, in biblical narrative, this is its primary building block. On the close connection between "plot" and causation, see Gilmour, *Representing the Past*, 45–47.

4. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* 1.3.2. See analysis in John P. Wright, *Hume's Treatise of Human Nature: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 90–93.

5. The exploitation in biblical literature of Hume's logical fallacy demonstrates Marais' point that modern logic cannot be applied uncritically to ancient texts.

For example, in Gen 28–29, Jacob's encounter with the Lord at Bethel, and his subsequent vow that the Lord will be his God if he protects him, is immediately followed by a successful betrothal scene at a well. Although God is not mentioned in the narrative during Jacob's time with Laban until 29:31, his intervention is implicit because of the previous scene. Similarly in 2 Sam 15, David's prayer in v. 31, "O Lord, I pray you, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness," is juxtaposed with the arrival of Hushai with whom David concocts a plan to thwart Ahithophel. The contiguity of these two events implies that David's prayer and God's response are the cause of Hushai's appearance. Although divine sovereignty is not mentioned in either of the second stories, their placement after the preceding episodes of supplication compels the reader to interpret divine causation.

Alongside causation, a narrative unit can provide general background information for a juxtaposed unit that follows chronologically. Jacob's favouritism of Joseph and Benjamin in the Joseph story is explained in light of Jacob's preference for Rachel over Leah in the previous story. Similarly, the episode in Gen 30:1–13 is supplied background information by 29:31–35. Although nothing is said of Leah's children in 30:1, the reader understands why Rachel would be jealous of Leah because Leah's children have been enumerated in 29:32–35. Furthermore in 30:2, when Rachel asserts that God has denied her children, it is not read as idiomatic or dramatic hyperbole from Rachel because her position is confirmed by 29:31.

A final type of example is where there is a particular phrase in an episode that requires an antecedent in the previous pericope. The phrase "from there" in 2 Kgs 2:23 is only known to mean "from Jericho" from the previous episode. In other examples there is not a specific phrase referring to an antecedent, but the absence of information encourages the reader to look for information in the previous passage. First Samuel 12 begins with no information about the setting, but the previous episode closes with the people at an assembly in Gilgal, so in a synchronic reading this can be interpreted as the location for Samuel's speech in the next chapter.

Sternberg's analysis of juxtaposition suggests that the commencement of a new episode creates a gap that must be filled by the reader. However, chronological juxtaposition can simultaneously achieve the reverse and fill in a gap. This is particularly the case with characters' motivations. When Gideon lays out the fleece in Judg 6:36–40, it is unclear whether it is because of his fear and hesitation, or because of a commendable faith that God alone will bring him victory. However, because of Gideon's

cowardice in the previous episode (6:27), compounded with his expressions of doubt in 6:14–23, the reader infers that Gideon is more likely motivated by fear than by faith.[6]

b. *Consequences and Hindsight*

It is intuitive that the interpretation of a narrative unit will be affected by the episode or story immediately before it. However, the reverse is equally important. The second unit can affect the interpretation of a unit that is either chronologically prior or prior in the order of presentation of the narrative. This is illustrated by the importance of the ending of a story for its interpretation. Rimmon-Kenan describes the interpretative strength of the final viewpoint in a story and calls it "the *recency* effect." The end of the story will overshadow earlier meanings and attitudes, and shape the reader's overall interpretation of the text.[7] In turn, different endings will cause the reader to interpret the same story in different ways.[8] This is a normal part of our everyday experience. For example, whether a lottery ticket wins or not will shape an evaluation of whether its purchase was a good use of money. This tendency to judge based on hindsight also functions in our reading of the plot of a story.

Furthermore, interpretation is not withheld until the end of a story, but the meaning is constantly being revised throughout the reading process.[9] Thus every successive chronological episode will affect its previous episode, not only the final episode.

This type of interpretation can be demonstrated through examples in biblical narrative. First, there are juxtaposed narratives where the consequences in the second narrative unit reinterpret the first. The defeat of Jericho by the Israelites in Josh 6 read independently would suggest an unqualified success. However, one of the consequences of the attack is that Achan took from the devoted things, as reported in 7:1. This in turn leads to a military failure against Ai. Thus the success against Jericho is reevaluated as successful but tainted by the sin of Achan.

6. As concluded by Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading* (JSOTSup 46; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 150; and Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (BerOl; Collegeville: Liturgical, 2000), 109–10.

7. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1982), 120–21.

8. For example, a study of John Fowles' novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* which contains two alternative endings, has shown how the two different endings given by the author cause the reader to interpret earlier elements of the story in two different ways (see Charles Scruggs, "The Two Endings of the French Lieutenant's Woman," *MFS* 31 [1985]: 95–113).

9. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 121.

Secondly, information revealed by the narrator or characters after an event, even if it is not a direct consequence, can influence the way that the earlier story is interpreted. Deborah's warning in Judg 4:9 that Sisera would be delivered into the hands of a woman initially suggests to the audience that Deborah will bring about the military victory. However, as the story progresses in the next episode, it is revealed that this prophecy refers to Jael not Deborah. The additional information is withheld in order to play with the reader's expectations, and the prophecy cannot be correctly interpreted until the reader is in the position of hindsight. Similarly, Absalom's inaction after the violation of his sister in 2 Sam 13:1–22 can be explained by his waiting until a better opportunity to kill Amnon two years later in 13:23–39. His intention for revenge is not initially revealed, but, when it takes place, the benefit of hindsight reveals that this was an important motivation for his seeming inaction.

Overall, we see how chronological arrangement has a particular effect on the interpretation of individual units. A chronological plot creates causation, consequences, and hindsight in the narrative.

2. *Non-chronological Interpretation: The Dialogue of Voices*

There are many points in biblical narrative where it is not definite that episodes or stories are placed in strict chronological sequence, and thus the chronological interpretation described above is not appropriate. Furthermore, when episodes or stories are in temporal sequence, a chronological interpretation is not the only way that the narratives influence and change one another. Thus another category of interpretation of juxtaposed narratives is introduced. It explains the patterning of non-chronological episodes and offers a more general way of interpreting episodes outside of chronological relationship.

A critic's description of the novel *Alias Grace* by Margaret Atwood can equally be applied to the patterning of non-chronological episodes in biblical narrative:

> Like the quilt patterns that adorn the title pages of each of its fifteen sections, Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* presents an intricate patchwork of texts as an 'other' means of representing historical events and persons that rejects the mono-vision of traditional histories and highlights the processes of framing and arranging pieces in particular juxtapositions. This mode of representation undermines linearity and the cause-and-effect logic that derives from it. The result, however, is not chaos but

> rather a deliberate and more spatial construction that functions as a dynamic, ever evolving whole while retaining the integrity of its separate pieces.[10]

Atwood's embrace of a post-modern approach to the presentation of historical fiction uses a variety of different historical sources interwoven with a fictional first-person account to offer different points of view, all in dialogue with one another. Comparison can be made with the pre-modern presentation of the Bible, which also uses a "spatial" construction at times to explore themes and meaning, and to offer different points of view both narratival and ideological. Spatial construction makes chronological sequence optional, and it draws connections between narratives that are not closely or logically connected temporally by placing them in literal contiguity. The themes and different ideologies can be forced into dialogue with each other through their physical proximity on the page. While we are concerned specifically with juxtaposition, there is often a larger structure of narratives that incorporates both chronological and non-chronological episodes. Together they solicit an interpretation beyond the causes and consequences described above.

Secondly, we can take a step back from the postmodern novel and make use of Bakhtin's analysis of predominantly modern novels. By assigning different episodes and stories as different "voices" within the text, the analogy allows us to make use of Bakhtin's work on dialogism and polyphony within a text. There are always limitations to applying literary theory of the modern novel to an ancient text, but, by using his framework, a useful identification is made of the types of relationship between these juxtaposed narratives.

The key idea from Bakhtin that is useful here is dialogism. This is the theory that truth cannot be contained in a single consciousness but rather is expressed by the conversation and interaction of different voices.[11] Dialogism, in this sense,[12] is in contrast to monologic expression of truth,

10. Magali C. Michael, "Rethinking History as Patchwork: The Case of Atwood's *Alias Grace*," *MFS* 47 (2001): 421.

11. Due to the limitations of space, this is necessarily a simplification of Bakhtin's concept that is integrated with many other aspects of his theory of the novel. His concept of dialogism in the novel is particularly explored in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (trans. C. Emerson; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Dialogism and its connections to other Bakhtinian ideas are discussed and explained in Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (2d ed.; London: Routledge, 1990).

12. Throughout Bakhtin's works he has at least three different senses of dialogue, according to Morson and Emerson. Alongside the dialogism discussed here,

where even though there may be many voices, they are ultimately synthesised and can be contained within the one consciousness. Bakhtin calls Dostoevsky's novels the first *polyphonic* novels, meaning there are many different voices created by the author in the novel that are not controlled by him/her, and therefore none has precedence. Although the author will inevitably have a voice, he/she does not control the other voices. In this way the novel conveys a dialogic sense of truth.[13]

Biblical narrative is obviously not a polyphonic novel—it does not have a single author, and it is not a novel. However, Bakhtin's theory of dialogism has been applied successfully in biblical studies. Newsom points to two possible objections. The first is that there is not a single author but rather there are many voices, which are the result of the multiple authors and the scribal practice of incorporating earlier source material into their compositions. However, she writes, "Thus, whereas a narrative like the Primary History is not a self-consciously polyphonic text, there is a kind of incipient polyphony in the cultural and intellectual practices which made use of a variety of distinctive and unmerged voices in the production of a complex narrative."[14] Polzin, who pioneered the use of Bakhtin in his trilogy on the Deuteronomistic History analyses the presence of different voices in the history. He determines that it is monologic because the narrator and the characters' voices are subordinate to the word of God; but he also identifies a *hidden dialogue* within the word of God and the narrator, because the other voices are allowed to be heard.[15] Thus the concept of dialogism is useful for understanding the

there is dialogue inherent in each single utterance and dialogism as a system of truth (Gary S. Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990], 130–31).

13. Explored in most detail in Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 5–46, especially pp. 6–7. Bakhtin's concept of polyphony is described in more detail in Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 231–68.

14. Carol A. Newsom, "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," *JR* 76 (1996): 298. Walter Reed, in his application of Bakhtin to the Bible also considers that "the heterogeneous textuality of the Bible…is better served by a model of *dialogues*, of question and answer, of story and counter story, of statement and response" (Walter L. Reed, *Dialogues of the Word: The Bible as Literature According to Bakhtin* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 13). In contrast, others have used Bakhtin's theory of dialogism to argue for the unity of authorship in some sections of the biblical narrative (e.g. Paul S. Evans, "The Hezekiah–Sennacherib Narrative as Polyphonic Text," *JSOT* 33 [2009]: 335–58) rather than as a way of reading a multi-authored text.

15. Robert M. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History: Part One* (New York: Seabury, 1980), 21–22.

workings of biblical narrative even if one ultimately agrees with Polzin that, in its final form, it is a monologue. As Green writes, "a monologic work may flower a bit if we read it with some awareness of polyphonic strategies."[16]

The second possible objection Newsom comments upon is that the voices in biblical narrative have merely been placed side by side and that they do not dialogue in the Bakhtinian sense.[17] As Newsom says, juxtaposition itself can create a dialogue, and our survey of juxtaposition earlier showed this. Modern scholars, including those interested in either diachronic or synchronic approaches, the Rabbis, and even the biblical text itself recognise the dialogue between juxtaposed narratives and its effect on their respective interpretations.

With this justification and precedence, we return to our own study of the types of interpretation that juxtaposed texts impose upon one another. According to Bakhtin, dialogue occurs when "there is a coming together of two utterances equally and directly oriented toward a referential object."[18] The relationship between some juxtaposed narratives is purely chronological and therefore causal/consequential as described earlier. In these texts there is not necessarily any orientation in the two texts towards a common object, and the theory of dialogism is not relevant. Indeed, in these cases, the juxtaposed episodes are effectively fused into a single developing discourse, even if they originally had separate authors and were distinct voices. However, alongside the causal/consequential relationship between juxtaposed episodes, it is our hypothesis that the other type of relationship is analogous to a dialogic relationship as described by Bakhtin. An example of a dialogic relationship between juxtaposed episodes has been highlighted by Mitchell in the books of Chronicles. First Chronicles 10:1–12 presents one position on the death of Saul: Saul died because of a military event in which he committed suicide to salvage his personal dignity. First Chronicles 10:13–14 then

16. Barbara Green, *How Are the Mighty Fallen? A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1 Samuel* (JSOTSup 365; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 275. Green argues elsewhere that a Bakhtinian approach is appropriate and not anachronistic for ancient texts because Bakhtin's method was precisely comparing older and more recent literature (Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction* [Atlanta: SBL, 2000], 61). She demonstrates its fruitfulness by applying the approach to Saul in both monographs. Although Green does not look at dialogue between juxtaposed episodes, she applies the concept of dialogism to the voices of different characters in the story.

17. Newsom, "Bakhtin," 299.

18. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 188.

answers this position by asserting that Saul did not die because of the military defeat but God killed him because of his unfaithfulness. Mitchell writes, "Although the latter position intends to overwhelm the first, the first remains and, by its very presence, prevents the monologic vision of the second."[19]

In order to refine our understanding of this dialogic relationship, we will look at three main ways Bakhtin discusses the dialogue of discourses with one another. Throughout his writings, he explores how discourses contradict, corroborate, and question and answer.[20] He outlines in his *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics* that:

> [Discourses] within the limits of a single context cannot exist side by side without intersecting dialogically, regardless of whether they confirm, mutually supplement, or (conversely) contradict one another, or find themselves in some other dialogic relationship (that of question and answer, for example). Two equally weighted discourses on one and the same theme, once having come together, must inevitably orient themselves to one another. Two embodied meanings cannot lie side by side like two objects—they must come into inner contact; that is they must enter into a semantic bond.[21]

We will look at each of these types of dialogue separately and demonstrate how juxtaposed episodes and stories, both chronological and non-chronological, thus interpret one other.

a. *Contradiction*

One effect of placing an episode or a story next to another narrative is that it can produce a dialogue of contradiction. Biblical scholars generally see contradictions in biblical narrative as a problem, but they have also been helpful for identifying different authors in the text. Presumably no ancient writer wished to contradict himself outright.

Bakhtin makes an important distinction between a dialectic and dialogic relationship: contradictory dialectic relationships may be logically contradictory statements, but, unless they are somehow embodied in the narrative, there will be no real dialogic relationship between them. A dialectic can still be contained within one consciousness, but a dialogue

19. Christine Mitchell, "The Dialogism of Chronicles," in *The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture* (ed. M. P. Graham and S. L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 263; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 323.

20. Note Marais, *Representation*, 61, also observes there is "paradox," "complementarity," and "congruence" between juxtaposed narratives, although he only discusses "paradox" in detail.

21. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 188–89.

begins a conversation between the two points of view.[22] As Bakhtin writes in his notes: "Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics."[23] Juxtaposition of episodes and stories creates a dialogue because each narrative embodies contradictory ideas that are then forced into conversation by their contiguity. Naturally the biblical editor did not conceptualise the new arrangement as Bakhtin's "dialogism," but it shows how a statement or circumstance that was previously monologic can become complex by contradiction.

For example, in Gen 27:42–45 Rebekah tells Jacob to flee because Esau wants to kill him and therefore he ought to take refuge in the house of her brother at Haran. In the next episode, in Gen 27:46–28:5, Rebekah tells Isaac that Jacob needs to leave so that he will not marry any of the Hittite women. Then Isaac tells Jacob to go to Paddan-Aram to Rebekah's family to marry. The contradiction between the place names can be considered dialectic. However, there is contradictory dialogic relationship between the two episodes because they each embody two different reasons for Jacob to leave his father and mother and go to Laban.[24] The contradiction can be resolved: perhaps Rebekah is making up an excuse so that Isaac will bless Jacob's journey as he flees Esau; or perhaps there were two reasons for Jacob to leave. However, any explanation for the contradiction is a new meaning in the narrative, and it changes our interpretation of each episode read individually. The two episodes are in dialogue with one another, and the result is a more complex interpretation that is different from either of the original ones.

Another example of contradiction is between Exod 4:24–26 and the surrounding episodes. In Exod 3:1–4:23 God commissions Moses to return to Egypt and speak to Pharaoh in order to bring his people out of Egypt. Then in 4:24 God wants to put Moses to death (ויבקש המיתו, "and

22. Ibid., 183.

23. Mikhail Bakhtin, "From Notes Made in 1970–71," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (ed. C. Emerson and M. Holquist; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 147.

24. This wide gap between motives is observed by Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (AB 1; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 215. Commentators assign the first version to J and the second to P. As Speiser points out, the episodes differ in style, phraseology, and timetable, as well as motivation for Jacob. Cf. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (WBC 2; Dallas: Word, 1994), 204, argues that the author of the second episode was aware of the first. However, he does not deny that there are two different reasons given in the adjacent passages for Jacob's flight to Laban.

he sought his death").[25] This contradicts the surrounding material, where God wants Moses very much alive so that he can perform the task he was commissioned to do. On an ideological level, these episodes are in a dialogue of contradiction about whether God is for or against Moses, and whether it is important to the mission that Moses (or his son depending on the reading)[26] is circumcised. This tension is not one that is easily resolved. Most readers will be left with little choice but to understand that, at one moment, God wants Moses to perform a specific function for him and, at the next moment, he wants to kill him. Nevertheless, even if the circumstances remain more or less at logical odds, the embedded ideas enter dialogue. Now it is understood that God was not only commissioning Moses to do a task but was also concerned with him as a person. Furthermore, the meaning of vv. 24–26, that circumcision was of utmost importance,[27] is intensified because God wants to kill the man who is so central to his purposes for the people of Israel. The contradiction between these two stories is not just dialectic but rather each is embedded in an episode full of ideas and ideology, and the dialoguing ideas make the interpretation of each episode more complex and intense.

b. *Corroboration*

The second way that narratives can dialogue is through corroboration. Bakhtin highlights that agreement or corroboration can be just as much a dialogue as disagreement. Morson and Emerson explain it in this way:

> Let us imagine two specific people speaking the following two utterances, the second person replying to the first: "Life is good," says the first person; "Life is good," answers the other. From the point of view of linguistics, we have a repetition of the same sentence. From the point of view of logic, we have a specific logical relation, namely, identity. But from the metalinguistic point of view we have something quite different, the dialogic

25. Note the confusion among commentators about the one God is trying to kill because Moses' name is not mentioned. However, positioned after the previous episode, Moses is the only candidate as the antecedent for the subject of ויהי ("and he was") and the object of ויפגשהו ("and [the Lord] met him") (see Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974], 99).

26. Although it is clearly Moses' son who is circumcised in these short verses, it is possible that Moses also was not circumcised (as he had been brought up as an Egyptian), and so Zipporah's solution was a vicarious circumcision of their son (John I. Durham, *Exodus* [WBC 3; Waco: Word, 1987], 58–59).

27. See Childs, *Exodus*, 104. Childs argues also that this is not an etiological legend about circumcision (as suggested by Wellhausen and Noth), but rather circumcision explains the meaning of this story (pp. 97–100).

> relation of *agreement*. The second person, from his own experience, confirms the judgement of the first, who has arrived at it by a different experience.[28]

Two stories or episodes can convey the same, or similar, message, ideas, theology, or evaluation of a character but have arrived at this conclusion via a different route. The resulting interpretation of each narrative is richer than when they are read independently, because certain ideas are emphasised and made more complex through the agreement.

Often passages that are generally noted for their contradiction also contain considerable corroboration. For example, although the two sets of instructions to Noah in Gen 6:17–22 and 7:1–5 contradict one another in the number of clean animals Noah should take into the ark, they agree with each other in many other respects. In each, God will destroy all living things except Noah, his family, and a small sample from each species of animal. The message is largely the same even if the details are different.

The corroboration of ideological or theological ideas can also be conveyed through different sets of events. For example, the juxtaposed stories in Judg 17–18 and 19–21 corroborate the tribal disintegration and moral decline of the period when "there was no king in Israel" with two very different scenarios. The corroboration draws attention to the shared ideological viewpoint and highlights its importance in the interpretation of the stories.

Another way corroboration functions in biblical narrative is by establishing an inner-biblical allusion.[29] Two episodes can each have a subtle allusion to a third passage or tradition elsewhere in biblical narrative, and, when the episodes are brought together, the allusion is corroborated and becomes more explicit. For example, in Josh 3–5 there are allusions to the Exodus in each pericope. Although the allusion may not be to the final form of the book of Exodus, it is certainly to the tradition of the

28. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 132.

29. This concept is also often known as "intertextuality," but this term is problematic because of its lack of precise definition. For a full discussion and overview of its ambiguity, and justification for selecting the term "inner-biblical allusion," see Geoffrey D. Miller, "Intertextuality in Old Testament Research," *CBR* 9 (2011): 283–309. In the term "intertextuality," it is unclear whether the link between passages is from the author or the reader, whereas "inner-biblical allusion" clarifies that it is an intended allusion by one of the authors/editors. Still, there is difficulty with this term because sometimes it is not certain that the allusion is to the final form of the biblical narrative or to an earlier/concurrent tradition. As we will see in the following example of Joshua and Exodus, the allusion may be to a biblical tradition rather than the version of the text as we have it.

exodus from Egypt found therein. In 3:1–5:1 the Israelites cross the Jordan in an unmistakable echo of the crossing of the Red Sea after the exodus from Egypt. Egypt is mentioned five times in 5:2–9, when the Israelites circumcise the new generation of men. In 5:10–12 they celebrate Passover, again remembering God's deliverance of Israel in Egypt. Finally, the episode in 5:13–15 echoes Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush in Exod 3, particularly in Josh 5:15 and Exod 3:5.[30] These allusions corroborate one another to highlight the reference to the exodus.

c. *Question and Answer*

Other narratives dialogue, not through contradiction or corroboration, but by complementing one another. They interact through a question and answer relationship. One passage will leave gaps or invite questions that are subsequently explained or filled by the narrative placed next to it. The questions in the first passage are now reinterpreted in light of the second passage. Similarly, the second passage has additional meaning because of its new interpretation as an answer to the previous passage.[31]

Bakhtin explains why questioning and answering functions as dialogue: "*Question* and *answer* are not logical relations (categories); they cannot be placed in one consciousness (unified and closed in itself); any response gives rise to a new question. Question and answer presuppose mutual outsidedness."[32]

Questions and answers are by nature from different voices, which interact with one another, usually producing more questions. This type of interpretation is common between juxtaposed episodes or stories because they provide the discrete voices needed for the dialogue. Often the questioning narrative will also offer possible answers, and this is made more complex by dialogue with the answers in the juxtaposed narrative. Bakhtin's observation that the answers create more questions can be applied to the biblical text. The answers provided by the juxtaposed episode are usually not definitive but rather they contribute to the conversation.

30. Butler, *Joshua*, 57.

31. See, for example, the analysis in Reed, *Dialogues of the Word*, 18–30, of questions and answers in Genesis. There are three dialogues established in the "primeval history" between God and a husband and wife, God and two brothers, and God and a lone righteous man. Throughout the book of Genesis, these dialogues are answered by parallel dialogues.

32. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 168.

One example of a question and answer dialogue in biblical narrative is in 1 Sam 24 and 25. In ch. 24 David forgoes an opportunity to kill Saul in a cave when Saul is pursuing him in the wilderness. This chapter encourages the reader to ask a number of questions. For example, did David make the right decision? Will Saul continue to pursue David? Will David ever become king if he will not dare to kill Saul, the Lord's anointed? In the next chapter, these questions are given answers—not definitive answers—but answers nonetheless. In a parallel plot to ch. 24, David is about to kill Nabal but restrains himself.[33] He is later justified in his restraint when Nabal dies of a heart attack through divine intervention. This suggests that David is right not to take a human life because God will intervene without David's help. On the other hand, the question is left open because Saul continues to pursue David in ch. 26 and David has another opportunity to take his life. Significantly, the question is not answered by learning the end of the story but rather by a juxtaposed story that provides a theological answer.

Thus we can identify three main ways that episodes and stories interpret each other non-chronologically—through contradiction, corroboration, and question/answer. Bakhtin's theory of dialogism shows that the success of the juxtaposition is in bringing together two or more voices that each address the same subject in some way. The different voices interact to produce complex meaning, which changes or enhances the interpretation of each individual episode or story in this context. This is achieved through the spatial contiguity of stories on the page rather than chronological sequence.

33. On these parallel plots, see David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (JSOTSup 14; Sheffield: JSOT, 1980), 97–98; Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel*, 129; Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel* (WBC 10; Waco: Word, 1983), 248; Robert M. Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History: Part Two—I Samuel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 211; Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 154; Mark E. Biddle, "Ancestral Motifs in 1 Samuel 25: Intertextuality and Characterization," *JBL* 121 (2002): 617–38; Barbara Green, "Enacting Imaginatively the Unthinkable: 1 Samuel 25 and the Story of Saul," *BibInt* 11 (2003): 1–23.

Chapter 4

KEYS TO THE CONNECTION BETWEEN EPISODES

Two texts placed next to one another will only reinterpret one another if there is some connection between them. Often this connection is a chronological one, but, where the temporal sequence is broken, other elements in the narrative are able to link them and direct the reader's attention to the interpretation. This link creates the common referential object, which according to Bakhtin is required for voices to dialogue with one another. As we saw earlier, this dialogue generates the non-chronological interpretation.

Many causal and consequential interpretations are self-evident as the causal chain is the dominant feature of the plot. For example, it is easy for a reader to discern that Joseph is an attendant in the Egyptian prison in Gen 40 as a result of the events in Potiphar's household in ch. 39. However, there are often more complex causal relationships that are highlighted only through certain features in the text. In the case of non-chronological interpretation, there is even more need for verbal clues in the text to identify the common referential object in episodes and stories.

Usually this common object between non-chronological episodes or stories is a character or a theme. Once an opinion is formed regarding a character, this evaluation is likely to affect the way the audience reads the character's future actions and motivations.[1] However, the effect is also dialogic, and the new episode or story will interact with, change, and even stand in tension with the evaluation in the previous narrative. This can occur throughout the entire length of a story, but it is even more pronounced when two episodes are placed next to each other. For example, Samuel's bad management of his sons in 1 Sam 8:1–3 encourages

1. Cf. Amit, in a study of 1 Sam 15, suggests that once a character has been proved unreliable, he/she remains so for the reader (Yairah Amit, "'The Glory of Israel Does Not Deceive or Change His Mind': On the Reliability of Narrator and Speakers in Biblical Narrative," *Proof* 12 [1992]: 204, 209).

the reader to interpret his displeasure at Israel's request for a king in the next episode as having personal as well as theological motives. This connection is highlighted by verbal cues: the repetition that Samuel is old and that his sons do not follow his ways.

In this section, we will examine three devices that are used to orient the reader to the interpretation of themes and characters in adjacent texts: the repetition of words and phrases; parallel plots; and *mise-en-abyme*. By identifying these connecting elements, each passage can be interpreted according to the intention of the juxtaposition. There is invariably a myriad of ways that juxtaposed episodes reinterpret one another. Usually it is not just one of the following devices functioning alone but rather a combination that points to different aspects of the interpretation. These elements guide the reader towards the common elements in the juxtaposed units entering dialogue with one another.

1. *Repetition of Words and Phrases*

The repetition of words, phrases, or concepts between juxtaposed episodes points to the common elements between them. The repetition can be the common object itself, it can symbolise it, or it can be an aid for interpreting some other object. As we look at examples of repetition, we will observe how the repeated elements relate to the resulting interpretation.

a. *Repetition of Key Words*

The repetition of a key word between two adjacent episodes will often point to a connection between them.[2] For example, in 1 Sam 18 there are three adjacent episodes each using the root אהב ("to love"): vv. 1–4 (v. 1), vv. 5–16 (v. 16), and vv. 17–29 (v. 20). In this example, the repeated word is used in the same grammatical construction each time. First Jonathan, then the people of Israel and Judah, and finally Michal love David. The repetition points to the common theme that all these people should be loyal towards Saul because he is their father or their king, but instead they love David. Furthermore, it is in contrast to Saul

2. For several more examples of the repetition of a *Leitwort* in adjacent episodes in Gen 1–11, see Ronald Hendel, "*Leitwort* Style and Literary Structure in the J Primeval Narrative," in *Sacred History, Sacred Literature: Essays on Ancient Israel, the Bible, and Religion in Honor of R. E. Friedman on His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. S. Dolansky; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 95–102. Similar to our argument, he demonstrates that different narrative traditions have been brought together into chronological order and that the repeated words provide further links between the passages beyond temporal succession.

who progressively becomes more jealous of David. This is emphasised by two more repetitions of this word, in 16:21 where Saul himself loves David, and in 18:28 where he becomes his enemy. Thus there is a dialogue of corroboration between the stories. Each type of "love" is slightly different[3] and embedded in a different story, but they all agree that David is popular in place of Saul.

The repeated word שם in Gen 10 (vv. 1, 14, 21, 22, 25), 11.1–9 (v. 4), 11:10–32 (v. 10), and 12:1–9 (vv. 2, 8) points to a dialogue between these four juxtaposed episodes. In contrast to the last example however, the word is given a different meaning in each of its usages (particularly 11:10 where it is a proper noun). Nevertheless, a common theme is linked to the word.[4] In 11:1–9, the people wish to make a name for themselves, but this attempt is frustrated by divine intervention. Yet, in the genealogies on either side of this story, in ch. 10 and 11:10–32, the people do have a name for themselves because the line of Shem (שם) is successfully extended to Abraham. A dialogue of contradiction is generated where God is both preventing and allowing the building of the "name" of the people.[5] The dialogue is extended in 12:1–9, where God explicitly promises to bless the descendants of Abraham and to make his name great (ואגדלה שמך). Not only is שם a verbal link, its meaning points to one of the themes that links the three episodes.[6]

b. *Repetition of a Minor Character*

Unlike major characters in the narrative, there is usually only one idea or theme attached to minor characters, and so the mention of their name will invoke the association with the previous episode where they featured. An example of this is in 1 Kgs 1:1–4 and 1:5–40. In the first episode, the introduction of Abishag in the story demonstrates the effect of old age upon David: bad health and impotence. However, the allusion

3. On the flexibility of the verb אהב ("to love") in this passage, see John A. Thompson, "The Significance of the Verb Love in the David–Jonathan Narratives in 1 Samuel," *VT* 24 (1974): 334–38.

4. Despite the diverse origins of the episodes, described in Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (trans. J. J. Scullion; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1974), 540, 559–62, and *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary* (trans. J. J. Scullion; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1981), 134–36, 145.

5. This contradiction is lessened by reversals between the stories. Instead of Abraham staying and building a tower, he is told by God to "go." Furthermore, when Abraham does build an altar in v. 8, it is for invoking the Lord's name not his own (see Zakovitch, "Juxtaposition," 511–12).

6. See Mark A. Awabdy, "Babel, Suspense, and the Introduction to the Terah–Abram Narrative," *JSOT* 35 (2010): 3–29, for other links between the three episodes—for example, migration and settlement.

to her presence in v. 15, when Bathsheba comes to visit, brings additional interpretation to both episodes, and she becomes more than a reminder of David's impotence.[7] Now the first episode can be read as David distancing himself from his family and the associated responsibilities for appointing his successor. Furthermore, the second episode is read as Bathsheba's response to the realisation that Abishag has taken her influential position with the king, and she must therefore act to ensure her son Solomon is next in line. By making Abishag common to both episodes, her role in the episodes' meanings is brought to the forefront.

c. *Puns*

The repetition of a word in juxtaposed episodes that sounds the same, even if it has a different meaning, will draw a connection between the two concepts. מגן meaning "to hand over" in Gen 14:20 is recalled in the next episode in 15:1 when it is used to mean "shield." Despite the different meanings, the pun draws a connection and therefore opens a dialogue between the two ideas embodied in their respective pericopes. There is corroboration because, in the first episode, Abraham believes the blessing pronounced by Melchizedek and therefore refuses the help of the king of Sodom. Then in the second episode God grants him the blessing explicitly. Furthermore, the connecting time formula in 15:1 suggests a causal interpretation, and therefore God's blessing to Abraham can be seen as a reward for his belief in the previous chapter. In this case the repeated word מגן is not necessarily the object of interpretation, but it is closely connected with it and therefore highlights the link between the passages.

d. *Repeated Phrases and Sentences*

The repetition of a whole phrase or sentence is one of the most explicit ways of indicating the thematic connection between two stories or episodes. An example of a repeated sentence is found at the end of two episodes in Josh 7:1–26 and 8:1–29. In 7:26 and 8:29 the sentence ויקימו עליו גל־אבנים גדול עד היום הזה ("and they erected over it a great pile of stones until this day") is used to refer first to the body of Achan and then to the king of Ai.[8] By concluding both stories in this way,[9] the

7. Such as proposed in DeVries, *I Kings*, 9.

8. This repeated aetiological element is probably secondary to both of these episodes, and, in turn, the Achan episode is a later insertion into the Ai narrative (Trent C. Butler, *Joshua* [WBC 7; Waco: Word, 1983]).

9. As Berman points out, the positioning of both these sentences at the end of each of the episodes emphasises the parallel (Joshua Berman, *Narrative Analogy in*

causal and consequential link is emphasised. After dealing with the sin of Achan, Israel achieves success against Ai. This creates a tension: the first burial is tragic because it is one of Israel's own, whereas the second indicates victory over enemies. On the other hand, the first burial can now be interpreted as a victory because of its consequences in Ai. There is a dialogue of question and answer after the first pericope asks: what is the future of Israel when there is sin among them? The repetition of the pile of stones in 8:29 suggests this question is now answered and sin must be dealt with.[10] Furthermore, stones are again mentioned in the following episode in 8:32, when Joshua writes the law upon them. Now the stones point to the re-commitment of Israel to the Lord and add a further dimension to the consequences of the previous two episodes.

e. *Repetition of a Leading Word*

Leitwort or "leading word" is a term coined by Martin Buber to describe the phenomenon in the Hebrew Bible where a word is repeated throughout an episode. The function is to draw attention to the themes of the text so that when two adjacent episodes contain the same leading word, the connection is highlighted.[11] It functions in a similar way to the repetition of a single word, except that the link is even clearer to the audience and has greater emphasis.

For example, the root ראה ("to see") is a leading word in both 1 Sam 16:1–13 and 16:14–23. In the first story, the root appears in vv. 1, 6, and 7 (three times), and it contrasts Samuel's concern with outward appearance and God's concern with David's heart. In the next episode, the root is used in vv. 17 and 18, where one of Saul's servants "sees" for him and finds David to relieve Saul from the torment of the evil spirit. In each story, a leader of Israel cannot see appropriately, signalling Samuel's decline from when he was known as the seer (1 Sam 9) and emphasising Saul inadequacies.

f. *Word Pairs Used as Successive Leading Words*

Another method of drawing attention to parallels is through successive leading words that commonly occur in a word pair. Frisch demonstrates this phenomenon in an article on the word pair ראה ("to see") and שמע

the Hebrew Bible: Battle Stories and Their Equivalent Non-Battle Narratives [VTSup 103; Leiden: Brill, 2004], 16–17). Berman also explores a large number of other parallels between these stories (pp. 35–45).

10. Ibid., 35.

11. See Yairah Amit, "The Multi-Purpose 'Leading Word' and the Problems of Its Usage," *Proof* 9 (1989): 99–114, especially pp. 106, 109.

("to hear"), and he gives examples where this occurs within single episodes, in episodes in close proximity, and in juxtaposed episodes. His example of juxtaposed episodes is in 1 Sam 15–16. In ch. 15 שמע is a leading word appearing eight times. It is used in a play on Saul listening to the voice of the people and sparing the king of Amalek, then Samuel hearing the sound of sheep and confronting Saul that he did not listen to the voice of the Lord. Next, as discussed earlier, ראה functions as a leading word in ch. 16. The link between the two chapters is made stronger by the repetition of Samuel grieving Saul in 15:35 and 16:1. The connection between the successive plots is thus: because Saul failed to "hear" (שמע) the Lord in the first episode, now the Lord will "choose" (ראה) David in his place.[12] By using closely connected leading words in adjacent episodes, the episodes discuss different themes acting as a question and answer to one another.

g. *Repetition of an Inner-biblical Allusion or Other Concept*
Sometimes the use of a particular word or phrase is not necessary to repeat a concept in adjacent stories or episodes. As explained earlier, an inner-biblical allusion to the exodus from Egypt is found in four consecutive episodes in Josh 3–5. In this series of episodes, the common exodus allusions emphasise the link between Joshua entering the promised land and Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt.

2. *Parallel Plots and Narrative Analogy*

The thematic connections between episodes or stories can be highlighted through parallels between their plots. Often these will use repeated words or phrases to draw attention to the parallels, but the parallels are also found in the structure of the plot and the actions of the characters. Another way of understanding this phenomenon is as a specific type of "narrative analogy." Narrative analogy has become a familiar concept in biblical *poetics* and can be observed when characters or situations are compared and contrasted within units, in juxtaposed units, or even in stories that are some distance apart in the narrative.[13] In the specific case

12. Amos Frisch, "*shmʿ* and *rʾh* as a Pair of Leitwörter" [Hebrew], in *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division A: The Bible and Its World* (ed. H. Weiss and R. P. Margolin; Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1999), 94–95.

13. See Berman, *Narrative Analogy*, 1–17, for an overview. Discussing narrative analogies, Berman argues that a parallel is established when repeated words are used in the same function in both stories. However, as he also observes (pp. 25–26),

of juxtaposed units, we recognise the phenomenon through different types of parallel plots. We may expect narrative analogies to be a dialogue of corroboration, but small differences within the overall parallels can give rise to contradiction or question and answer.

a. *Similar Plot, Different Characters*

The first type of parallel plot is where similar events occur with respect to different characters. The parallels in plot may extend throughout the entire length of the episode and encompass many different actions throughout the narrative. If these parallel events occur in the same sequence, then the comparison will be even greater. In other cases, there may only be one or two events that are in parallel, generating a common theme in the episodes—for example, acts of deception or performing a miracle. The juxtaposed stories of Elijah and Elisha contain many similarities in their miracles: they both bring back a young boy from the dead, they both have a miracle where oil does not run out, they both provide food in miraculous ways.[14] The first function of the parallels is to highlight the similarities between the prophets and demonstrate that Elisha is a true successor to Elijah. Secondly, they demonstrate the differences between the two prophets when the plots diverge. For example, Elijah is much more solitary than Elisha, who has a political role.[15] The comparison encourages the reader to notice the characteristics of each prophet and therefore interpret the stories accordingly. Thirdly, the parallels in this case create a question and answer dialogue between the two stories. The story of Elijah ends with Elisha's request for a double

juxtaposed narratives urge the reader by their contiguity to look for connections, and, therefore, the links can be more hidden and still constitute a parallel. Berman's observation is helpful because repeated words used in the same function will place even greater emphasis on the parallel. As was discussed earlier, Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel*, 21–22, also describes juxtaposition as crucial for creating narrative analogies, although it can be the juxtaposition of characters as well as narrative units.

14. For detailed studies of these parallels, see Floor Maeijer, *Elisha as a Second Elijah: In the Period of the Prophetic Actions against the Baal Policy of the House of Ahab (I Kings 16,29–II Kings 11,20)* (Excerpta ex dissertatione ad doctoratum in Pontificio Instituto Biblico; Rome: Apeldoorn, 1989); Nachman Levine, "Twice as Much of Your Spirit: Pattern, Parallel and Paronomasia in the Miracles of Elijah and Elisha," *JSOT* 85 (1999): 25–46; Robert L. Cohn, *2 Kings* (BerOl; Collegeville: Liturgical, 2000), 92–94.

15. See, for example, John W. Olley, "Yhwh and His Zealous Prophet: The Presentation of Elijah in 1 and 2 Kings," *JSOT* 80 (1998): 32–33, on the differences between their miracles.

portion of his spirit (2 Kgs 2:9), ויהי־נא פי־שנים ברוחך אלי ("and please let me have a double portion of your spirit"), which is probably a request to be his heir.[16] Elijah replies ambiguously that it is a difficult thing, but it will be granted if Elisha sees Elijah taken from him. Even more ambiguously, when this event has taken place, it is only reported in direct speech that the spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha (2:15, ויאמרו נחה רוח אליהו על־אלישע, "and they said, 'the spirit of Elijah has rested upon Elisha'"). Thus a question is left open: is Elisha the firstborn heir to Elijah's spirit? The question is answered by the series of miracles performed by Elisha that echo Elijah's own prophetic ministry. The parallel plots compare and contrast the two prophets.

b. *Similar Plots, Similar Characters*

Plots can also be paralleled when they feature the same characters. In these cases, characters are not compared with other characters but with themselves. For example, the two episodes in 1 Kgs 17:7–16 and 17:17–24 contain parallels that encourage comparison between them.[17] In each, there is a problem of imminent or actual death (v. 12 and v. 17), which is relieved by the intervention of Elijah after the objections of the widow of Zarephath. In this example there are very few verbal parallels between the stories, but their juxtaposition is sufficient to emphasise the plot parallel. First, the similarity creates a dialogue of corroboration as God twice demonstrates power through Elijah. The second miracle is perhaps more impressive, but the stories essentially convey the same interpretation that Elijah's miracle is an act of God. In this case the interpretation of each episode is only affected by the juxtaposition in terms of intensification. However, differences or developments between the parallel plots are also highlighted and affect the interpretation. Despite the extraordinary nature of Elijah's miracle with the oil and flour in the first episode, it is only in the second episode that the woman states עתה זה ידעתי כי איש אלהים אתה ודבר־יהוה בפיך אמת ("now I know this, that you are the man of God and the word of the Lord is truly in your mouth"). In the first episode the woman obeys Elijah's instructions, so the audience is led to assume she believes Elijah's credentials. Her declaration in the second episode encourages the reader to reevaluate the first and suppose that she was not at first convinced by Elijah or his miracle.

16. See p. 80 n. 17, below.

17. These two stories are usually thought to be separate legends brought together and linked by the time phrase (e.g. B. O. Long, *1 Kings with an Introduction to Historical Literature* [FOTL 9; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984], 184).

c. *Repetition of the Same Plot*

Occasionally there is repetition of the same plot in adjacent episodes. One of the most famous of these is the double account of creation in Gen 1:1–2:3 and 2:4–25. In both accounts God creates plants (1:11–12; 2:9) and animals (1:24–25; 2:19), he creates male and female (1:26–27; 2:7, 21–23), and gives them food (1:29–30; 2:16). The contradictions between events in the two accounts, for example the order in which God created plants and humans, would suggest a dialogue of contradiction.[18] However, while the details of the stories contradict, the meanings of the episodes are complementary, and this is highlighted by the parallel events between them, albeit in a different order. The second episode in 2:4–25 answers questions about the man and woman who were created in 1:1–2:3.[19] Each episode augments the interpretation of the other because they give a multi-dimensioned, but not entirely contradictory, understanding of the events as a whole.

d. *Plot Reversals*

We have already alluded to how divergences in parallel plots generate a comparison between them. In some cases the divergences dominate, and the plot parallel is a reversal or inversion.

In Josh 9–11, there is a series of pericopes where different Canaanite kings hear about the success of Joshua against Ai and respond differently.[20] The connection is established between the pericopes by the repetition of the introductory phrase ויהי כשמע ("it happened when [he/they] heard") in 9:1, 10:1, and 11:1. The root שמע ("to hear") is also used to introduce 9:3. There are then two contrasting reactions: in all the episodes, the different kings gather together to fight Israel, but this is inverted in 9:3 when the Gibeonites approach Israel alone and offer peace through deception. The juxtaposition of inverted parallel plots creates a dialogue between the narratives by highlighting contrast and irony, now inducing the reader to interpret each episode in light of its opposite.[21]

18. This contradiction was "solved" by the Rabbis by explaining that vegetation was created on the third day, but it remained below the surface of the ground until the mist on the sixth day which caused it to grow (see *Gen. Rab.* on Gen 12:4; Ramban and Rashi on Gen 2:5).

19. See, for example, Coats, *Genesis*, 53.

20. See L. Daniel Hawk, *Joshua* (BerOl; Collegeville: Liturgical, 2000), 149–50.

21. On the interpretation of inverse stories which are not necessarily juxtaposed, see Yair Zakovitch, "Through the Looking Glass: Reflections/Inversions of Genesis Stories in the Bible," *BibInt* 1 (1993): 139–52.

3. *Mise-en-abyme*

Mise-en-abyme in general literary parlance is an embedded representation of the narrative as a whole.[22] In biblical narrative it is usually a single episode capturing the meaning of the whole story in which it is found.[23] The embedded episode is often monologic, and so it provides an unambiguous meaning against which the more complex surrounding narrative can be compared. Alternatively, it can expand the meaning of the main narrative by offering additional significance,[24] thus interacting in a dialogic relationship with the surrounding material.

The placement of the *mise-en-abyme* will also affect its function in interpretation. If the embedded text is placed near the beginning of the narrative, then the resemblance is often more subtle and suspense is maintained in the narrative. Only at the conclusion does the audience reflect on the abstract resemblance between the *mise-en-abyme* and the main narrative.[25] Alternatively, the *mise-en-abyme* at the beginning of the narrative can be explicit, and suspense is derived from the gradual fulfilment of each expectation and the revelation of the ending to the

22. See Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 124–25, and Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text* (trans. J. Whiteley and E. Hughes; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 41–54, for much more detailed expositions of this concept.

23. On *mise-en-abyme* in biblical narrative, see David A. Bosworth, *The Story within a Story in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (CBQMS 45; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of American, 2008). He argues for a narrative definition, according to the criteria given in Moshe Ron, "The Restricted Abyss: Nine Problems in the Theory of the *Mise en Abyme*," *PT* 8 (1987): 417–38. Thus he identifies only three occurrences in biblical narrative: Gen 38, 1 Sam 25, and 1 Kgs 13 (Bosworth, *Story within a Story*, 9–20). However, as can be seen from the examples given below, and the work of Bal, Polzin, and Green, there is much to be gained from a wider definition of *mise-en-abyme*, especially when we are inquiring about the juxtaposition of episodes that lie outside of the narrative flow.

24. As Dällenbach writes, "From the paradigmatic point of view, the fictional *mise-en-abyme*, like synecdoche, can be divided into two groups: the particularizing (miniature models), which concentrate and limit the meaning of the fiction; and the generalizing (transpositions), which give the context a semantic expansion beyond that which the context alone could provide. Compensating for what they lack in textual extent by their power to invest meaning, such transpositions present a paradox: although they are microcosms of the fiction, they superimpose themselves semantically on the macrocosm that contains them, overflow it and end up by engulfing it, in a way, within themselves" (Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, 59).

25. Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2d ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 58–59.

characters.[26] When the embedded text is placed at the end, then it is more likely to have the primary function of enhancing the significance of the story, and it will be more than a mere repetition of the elements in the main story.[27] Finally, it can appear in the course of the main narrative. In this position the reader is alerted that it is a *mise-en-abyme* because of the similarities to the beginning of the story already narrated. The reader is therefore able to interpret the remaining main story with reference to the *mise-en-abyme*.[28]

a. *Embedded Story*

Often called a "play within a play," a story can contain within itself a pericope that parallels its plot and therefore condenses its meaning within the episode. Polzin proposes that the episode in 2 Sam 2:12–16 captures the meaning of the story of David and Ishbosheth competing for the throne. He suggests that the twelve pairs of combatants are the twelve tribes of Israel over which David and Ishbosheth are fighting. When each man seizes his brother's "head," this symbolises the fight to be head of Israel when brother fights brother in this civil war.[29] This meaning is perhaps a little obscure except that the scene is surrounded by episodes of the civil war. Thus the episode foretells the bloodshed that will take place in the struggle for the throne.

Although Polzin does not interpret it this way, it creates a dialogue of contradiction and corroboration with the surrounding narrative, because in this *mise-en-abyme* there is no victor, just futile bloodshed. In contrast, the ensuing narrative demonstrates obvious victory for David. It does however hint at the anticlimactic way in which Ishbosheth will be brought down by betrayal from his own men. Thus it offers an answer to a question from the surrounding story.[30] By anticipating the ending of the story in only a veiled way, it does not undermine the suspense created in the story. Its position in the middle of the narrative concerning the civil war in Israel alerts the reader to some extent of its role as a mirror, and so offers a framework of interpretation for the reader as the narrative

26. Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, 61–62.

27. Ibid., 65–66; Bal, *Narratology*, 58–59.

28. According to Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, 67, this is the most common of positions. However, we keep in mind that his main subject of study was the *nouveau roman*, not biblical narrative.

29. Polzin, *Samuel and Deuteronomist; Part Three*, 31–35.

30. For more on *mise-en-abyme* as the answer to a question, see Green, *How Are the Mighty Fallen?*, 68.

continues. Only at the conclusion can these parallels be fully evaluated. In these ways the episode both enhances and challenges the interpretation of the surrounding story.[31]

b. *Other Genres*

The insertion of other genres into the narrative can summarise or encapsulate the meaning of the whole story in a way that is similar to the *mise-en-abyme*. A primary example of this is the insertion of poetry into the narrative. Poetry has the capacity to state abstract meaning explicitly and therefore is an effective way of interpreting the meaning of a whole story. Sometimes, as for instance in Exod 15, the poem will summarise the events as well as offer an evaluation of them (e.g. that the Lord has triumphed). Other poems do not even explicitly refer to the events but convey the meaning of the events in abstract form. For example, Hannah's poem in 1 Sam 2:1–10 only briefly mentions the plight of the barren in v. 5[32] but still encapsulates the overall message of the surrounding pericopes. The explicit theme of the poem is that God will raise up the lowly and bring down the mighty, and this is enacted when God gives the barren Hannah a child and this child, Samuel, eventually becomes a great leader in Israel in place of Eli.[33] Furthermore, it describes the replacement of Saul by David. This is an example of a *mise-en-abyme* at the beginning of the narrative demonstrating the significance of the following story. The abstract nature of poetry makes it ideal for this type of function.

Another genre that can be inserted into narrative is genealogy.[34] For example, the genealogy in Gen 5 gives the core information from the surrounding narrative. The chapter beforehand describes Adam's sons, and the chapter after describes the fate of some of his female descendants with the בני־האלהים ("the sons of God"). Although it contains none

31. See also Bosworth, *Story within a Story*, passim, for three more detailed examples of embedded stories in biblical narrative.

32. The secondary nature of the placement of Hannah's song is suggested not only by the disconnection with the plot, but also the textual evidence that it is inserted in a different position in the MT, LXX^{B}, and 4QSam^{a} (James W. Watts, *Psalm and Story: Inset Hymns in Hebrew Narrative* [JSOTSup 139; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992], 34–37).

33. Gilmour, *Representing the Past*, 112.

34. On the attribution of the genealogies in Genesis to the later contribution of P, which is still generally accepted, see Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History* (trans. W. H. Carruth; New York: Schocken, 1964), 145–60.

of the drama or theological evaluation of the surrounding narrative, it captures the proliferation and spread of Adam's descendants. Similarly, the table of nations in Gen 10:1–10 describes the spread of the nations after Noah, a message also conveyed by the episode about the tower of Babel in Gen 11:1–9.[35]

35. As Coats writes, "The story [Gen 11:1–9] accomplishes for J what the table of nations accomplishes for P" (Coats, *Genesis*, 96).

Chapter 5

Reading Juxtaposed Episodes: Chronological Continuity and Discontinuity

Within the sea of juxtaposed episodes in biblical narrative, the reader needs guidance as to whether juxtaposed episodes can be interpreted chronologically. Chronological continuity is required for causation of events or character development in adjacent narrative units. On the other hand, both continuity and discontinuity encourage the reader to look for other connections, such as motifs or verbal similarities, in order to discover meaning in the juxtaposition.

There are three aspects of narrative to consider when analysing continuity and discontinuity between episodes: *dramatis personae*; location/geographical setting; and time. Continuity of *dramatis personae* and time are integral to distinguishing between the types of juxtaposition, and geography is added to these because characters are necessarily bound by space. Discontinuity in space, when coupled with continuity in characters, will affect continuity of time, and so the three aspects are interdependent on one another.[1] These three features often appear together in the opening expository information of an episode, which sets the scene before the action takes place.[2] All three features may change throughout

1. Fludernik, in a diachronic study of English literature, also identifies these three elements as key to understanding transitions between scenes. She describes a scene shift as a concurrent change in location and *dramatis personae*, which may or may not coincide with a shift in time (Monica Fludernik, "The Diachronization of Narratology," *Narrative* 11 [2003]: 334). Concerning biblical narrative, Bar-Efrat writes, "Events are accorded uniqueness by virtue of their position on the coordinates of time and space" (Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* [JSOTSup 70; Sheffield: Almond, 1989], 184). Amit also describes the transition between units as transitions of time, place, and/or protagonists (Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001], 58).

2. Alter describes introductory expository information thus: "The paradigmatic biblical story…starts with a few brief statements that name the principal character or characters, locate them geographically, identify significant family relationships, and

the course of the episode, but the opening statements have a special structural role of orienting the reader to the new section after the end of the previous pericope. This will indicate whether the narrative units can be interpreted chronologically or not. Analysis of these features in different episodes reveals that there are patterns in the way that the types of juxtaposition are signposted. Although there will always be exceptions, the types of juxtaposition can be broadly categorised as demonstrated below. Furthermore, the signposting of the chronological relationship between whole stories, not just episodes or scenes, functions in a similar way, and we will review these cases afterwards.

As this section completes our analysis of the theory of juxtaposition, we will examine each example in more detail, drawing together all the elements of theory discussed above: causation/hindsight, dialogue between voices, and the literary keys to the connections between episodes. By taking the time to explore this array of examples, we will simultaneously demonstrate that the phenomena are widespread in biblical narrative and that the application of this theory produces compelling and original readings of many texts.

1. *Juxtaposition of Episodes and Scenes*

a. *Sequential Chronological Continuity*

The most common type of juxtaposition between pericopes in biblical narrative is a sequence of episodes that develops the plot in chronological order. Each episode will usually rely on the previous episode for causality or explanation of background details. They can also be interpreted as a dialogue of themes or ideas, but we will focus on their chronological interpretation in this section in order to demonstrate the contrast with non-chronologically juxtaposed episodes.

(1) *Continuity of person, place, and time*. In the first category of juxtaposition the characters, location, and time sequence is kept in continuity between the two episodes.

(i) Many sequences of episodes in biblical narrative have simple continuity of *dramatis personae*, place, and time. A main character will

in some instances provide a succinct moral, social, or physical characterization of the protagonist" (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 80). Note, however, that time designations also usually appear in this opening section. Not every episode begins with expository information, and in these cases the characters, time, and location can be introduced with the main action. Nevertheless, they will normally be established at the beginning of the unit.

remain constant between the episodes,[3] and, if there is no change in place or time, then the reader can usually assume that the new episode flows on smoothly from the previous episode. For example, Gen 32:4 begins a new episode when Jacob sends messengers to Esau after he encounters angels at Mahanaim. Jacob remains the central character, and there is no new time or place designation, even though it could be assumed that Jacob was still travelling on his journey. Continuity of all three of these features creates a strong link between the scenes and gives cohesion to Jacob's journey from Laban to Esau. This is despite the discrete events that occur along the way and their possible diverse literary origins. Each of the episodes is therefore interpreted sequentially, one as a consequence of the preceding one.

If the episode in Gen 32:2–3 is interpreted in isolation, it is a short and mysterious episode about Jacob's encounter with a camp of angels and an aetiology for the holy place Mahanaim.[4] The dual ending on Mahanaim can be interpreted as the ending for a place name rather than necessarily suggesting that there were two camps in the story.[5] The meaning of the encounter with the angels is ambiguous, as there are no clues about what was said or took place. There is military imagery in the use of the term מחנה ("camp"), but its purpose or its effect on Jacob is not explained.

However, because vv. 2–3 are placed in chronological sequence with the rest of ch. 32, the following episode in vv. 4–22 (which in turn is composed of a number of scenes) provides answers to these questions. The indication that v. 4 begins an episode sequential to vv. 2–3 allows the audience to interpret the wordplay on מלאכים ("angels/messengers")

3. However, when there is a shift in primary characters, there is often a disruption in the narrative. For example, in Gen 37–38, although Judah is distinguished briefly from among his brothers in 37:26–27, his personal point of view is not given significant focus. Therefore, the shift in 38:1 to his point of view causes a discontinuity in the narrative.

4. Many have noted that this unit is independent from its surrounding narrative and probably linked with Jacob's other divine encounters at Bethel and near Jabbok. On this pericope as an isolated and aetiological unit, see, for example, Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (trans. J. H. Marks; OTL; London: SCM, 1972), 312; and George W. Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature* (FOTL 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 223–24.

5. Compare, for example, the same ending on the place names יְרוּשָׁלַ֫ם ("Jerusalem") or שַׁעֲרַיִם ("Shaaraim," Josh 15:36; 1 Sam 17:52; 1 Chr 4:31). Notice that there is ambiguity in the episode. Jacob sees only one camp of angels (and thus his use of the singular: מחנה אלהים זה, "this is the camp of God") but names the place with the dual form מחנים. We will see in a moment that this is reinterpreted in light of the second episode.

in vv. 3 and 4 as a cause and effect in the narrative. The angels in v. 3 are a protection and encouragement to Jacob on his departure from Laban, and so prompt him to send other messengers to Esau.[6] The meaning of vv. 2–3 can be interpreted as a preparation for Jacob's meeting with Esau and the impetus for him to send messengers to him.[7] Similarly, the repetition of the term מחנה is another verbal link between the episodes. The military metaphor in the first episode now has meaning because the camps will provide defence against danger from Esau.

Overall, a sequential reading of these links suggests that Gen 32:2–3 explains the divine origin to Jacob's plan in vv. 4–22. Conversely, in isolation the following pericopes in chs. 32–33 would be interpreted as Jacob's own brave and clever plan to attempt reconciliation with Esau. However, as a result of 32:2–3, it is also interpreted as a divinely prompted and protected course of actions.[8]

(ii) In a variation of this type of juxtaposition, new episodes can begin with time or place designations that indicate a lapse of time but also maintain sequential continuity with the previous episode. Usually a time phrase will be used in this context only if it is specific and significant for the meaning of the passage. For example, Gen 41:1 begins with מקץ שנתים ימים ("at the end of two years") to express the two years that have passed between Pharaoh's restoration of his cupbearer and his dream about the coming years of plenty and famine. The character of Pharaoh provides continuity between the episodes, and there is no change of location. The time designation preserves a sequential order, but it also emphasises that there was a significant period of time before the cupbearer fulfilled his promise.

Interpreting it alone, Gen 40:1–23 tells a story of Joseph's ability to interpret dreams and continues the theme of his piety. When Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream and his subsequent promotion takes

6. However, the *Midrash Tanhuma*, *Genesis Rabbah*, and Rashi all suggest that they are angels that Jacob sends to Esau. Houtman also considers the proximity of these terms to exclude a change in meaning and uses this as evidence of the different origins of these sections (Cornelis Houtman, "Jacob at Mahanaim: Some Remarks on Genesis 32:2–3," *VT* 28 [1977]: 42).

7. For examples of this interpretation, see Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (IBC; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 261; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 281; Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 439.

8. This is further suggested by parallel with Jacob's dream in Gen 28:10–22 which is explicitly stated to be an offer of protection in v. 15 (והנה אנכי עמך ושמרתיך בכל אשר־תלך, "And behold, I will be with you and watch over you wherever you go") before Jacob's successful accumulation of wives and wealth in the house of Laban.

place, the story is reinterpreted and another layer of meaning is added. Joseph's interpretation of the cupbearer's dream is now a step towards Joseph's release from prison, management of Israel's grain, and therefore the cause of the reunion with his family. It is not only a story of Joseph's supernatural dream-interpretation skills but also a story of how these skills are a part of a providential journey, ending with the fulfilment of Joseph's own dream that his brothers will bow in homage to him.[9]

(iii) More often, a gap in time is expressed by a statement that the protagonist has moved to a new location, and the continuity is preserved by a verb of coming or going. In 1 Sam 21–22, as David flees Saul, each episode begins with a new change in location. In 21:2 David goes to Nob where he receives bread from the priest. Then in 21:11 he goes to Gath where he acts as a madman before King Achish,[10] and in 22:1 he goes to the cave of Adullam. Throughout this section, David remains the central character in the narrative, and there are no time designations throughout. However, the movement from place to place conveys an indeterminate stretch of elapsed time.

A sequential interpretation of the three pericopes in 1 Sam 21:1–22:5 highlights David's character development and a chain of causality between the episodes. Each pericope in isolation tells a story of David's flight from Saul, the dangers forcing him to move on to another place, and the deceptive aspects of David's behaviour.[11] When the stories are interpreted only by looking at thematic parallels, the reader gains a sense of David's repeated frustration but no further meaning. However, the sequential structure of the juxtaposition of these stories encourages the reader to search out development in the stories and to use this development to interpret them. David's journey leads him deeper into hiding from Saul, further from Israel, and into more secret locations. He journeys from Nob, which is an Israelite shrine, to the court of the nearby Philistine Gath, to hiding in a cave[12] in Adullam. Conversely, as David

9. Von Rad describes ch. 40 as an exposition for ch. 41, noting that all the characters of ch. 40 are mentioned again in ch. 41 and that the beginning of ch. 41 is based on the situation of ch. 40 (von Rad, *Genesis*, 369).

10. Note that a time designation is coupled with the verb of escaping, ויברח ביום־ההוא ("and he escaped on that day"), in order to describe the immediacy of David's flight from the danger at Nob. However, there remains an indeterminate gap in time between David's departure from Nob and his arrival in Gath.

11. At Nob, David's lie in v. 3 will eventually lead to the slaughter of the priests. At Gath he feigns madness and at Adullam he is surrounded by outlaws.

12. Note that McCarter, following Wellhausen, emends מערת to מצדת ("fortress") in light of vv. 4–5 (P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel* [AB 8; New York: Doubleday, 1980], 355). Both locations can be considered to be secure hiding places.

goes farther into hiding, the perception of his status increases. At Nob Ahimelech perceives him as a messenger of Saul, at Gath the Philistines speculate that he is a king, and at Adullam David accumulates an actual following of people over whom he is leader.

Furthermore, these developments in David's character and actions can be explained in terms of each previous episode. The positioning of the episode at Gath chronologically after the episode at Nob offers a reason why the Philistines recognise David. He is now carrying the sword of Goliath.[13] It was after David returned from killing Goliath in 1 Sam 18:6–7 that the song arose, "Saul has slain his thousands, David his tens of thousands," and thus the sword prompts the memory of Achish's servants. Secondly, David's brush with Doeg at Nob explains his fear and caution at Gath. He feigns madness before Achish has even reacted to the warnings of his courtiers. Similarly, the episode at Adullam gains richness in meaning as a consequence of the episode at Gath. David has realised he is not safe in the court of a foreign king and therefore hides in a cave. His increasing notoriety explains his honesty with the king of Moab compared with King Achish. Furthermore, the combination of danger and providential escape in the previous episodes explains David's uncertainty about what God intends for him (22:3, אדע מה־יעשה־לי אלהים, "[until] I know what God will do for me").

Sometimes there is no continuity between the locations, but the characters remain constant, so the discontinuity or disruption indicates that time has elapsed.[14] This proceeds from the pragmatic reality that it takes time to travel through space. Particularly where the length of time elapsed is not specified, the narrative allows for a period of time significant enough for character development, change, or personal realisation to have taken place. For example, the stage set in 1 Sam 26:1–3, where Saul searches for David in the wilderness of Ziph, has no explicit chronological or spatial connection to the previous narrative. A large amount of time may have elapsed since 1 Sam 24, when Saul ceased pursuing David, and he has had opportunity to reconsider this decision.

13. The significance of the sword in David's hand when he goes to the Philistine court was also observed by the Rabbis in *Midrash Tehillim* on Gen 34:1 (see also Yair Zakovitch, *David: From Shepherd to Messiah* [Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak ben Zvi, 1995 (Hebrew)], 54–55). Klein considers this sequence incongruous and therefore evidence of its diverse origins (Klein, *1 Samuel*, 215–16). However, the juxtaposition of these two episodes by the editor encourages the reader to find this link between them.

14. See G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (trans. J. E. Levin; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 89. He also uses "spatial breaks" in his analysis of chronology in Proust.

In summary, the markers at the beginning of these episodes alert the reader to their chronological sequence and the reason for their juxtaposition. This juxtaposition prompts a sequential interpretation of each episode and creates explanations and meanings that would not be found in the episodes in isolation.

(2) *Pericopes with partial discontinuity and a sequential time marker*. There are also a number of episodes that do not necessarily have continuity of characters or location but have a sequential time marker to emphasise the chronological ordering of the pericopes. These episodes usually begin with a time marker such as אחרי־כן ("after this"), אחר הדברים האלה ("after these things"), or אחר ("after"), followed by an event from the previous episodes.[15] The time gap between episodes can also be spanned by a summary event, for example in Exod 2:11, "when Moses grew up." There are a number of different examples that, for different reasons, use a sequential time marker to highlight that they need to be interpreted sequentially and causally.

(i) First, there can be discontinuity of characters and location, but the time designation indicates that continuity will soon be restored. For example, Gen 40:1 introduces three new characters who have not yet been encountered in the narrative: the cupbearer, the baker, and Pharaoh himself. These new characters bring with them an implicit change of location from the prison to the court of Pharaoh. The previous episode about Joseph and Potiphar's wife offers no obvious causes for the fate of the cupbearer and baker, and the connection to the previous chapter is only revealed when they are placed in prison in v. 3. This discontinuity is necessary to give background information that will later be important to the plot surrounding Joseph's promotion. The initial disorientation is significantly lessened by the time phrase, אחר הדברים האלה ("after these things"), at the opening of the episode.

15. On these time markers, see Charles Conroy, *Absalom Absalom! Narrative and Language in 2 Sam 13–20* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1978), 41–42; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 133–34. See also Long, *1 Kings*, 24–25, who points out specifically that the phrase is used to link independent traditions in the book of Kings. The Rabbis also saw the importance of these phrases and would seek to identify after which things the event occurred and what was the relation between them. For example, in Gen 22:20 Milcah's children are connected to the testing of Abraham because Abraham reflected that Isaac would have died with no children and therefore he should marry (*Gen. Rab.* 57:3; observed in Teugels, "Gap Filling," 594).

(ii) In some examples, continuity of person, place, and time is not restored explicitly within the pericope but is only demonstrated implicitly throughout the course of the narrative. Second Samuel 13 begins with the perspective of a new character, Absalom, and a new location, Jerusalem. There is some continuity in these features because Absalom is designated the son of David, and David and his people are travelling to Jerusalem in 12:31, providing a link with the previous setting in Rabbah. However, the combination of these aspects of discontinuity highlights that there is not an immediately obvious causal connection between chs. 12 and 13. The time phrase ויהי אחרי־כן ("and it happened after this") is used to introduce ch. 13 and to orient the reader to the sequential chronological continuity with chs. 11–12.[16]

In 2 Sam 13, chronological continuity emphasises that the sins of David's sons, which unfold in the following chapters, are a result of David's own sin in the story of Bathsheba and Uriah. They are a fulfilment of Nathan's prophecy that the sword would not leave David's house.[17] Furthermore, the phrase אחרי־כן ("after this"), immediately after the report that David returned to Jerusalem, creates an ominous beginning to the pericope because it echoes the beginning of ch. 9, where David is at home in Jerusalem before he spies Bathsheba. It initiates further parallels when the actions of David's sons imitate their father. In isolation, ch. 13 depicts only Amnon as the culpable figure in the rape of Tamar, but the sequence with chs. 11–12 implies that David's actions are also to blame.

(iii) In two other types of examples there is continuity of characters and location, but other elements of discontinuity between the episodes make special emphasis of the chronological sequence necessary. In the transition between Gen 47 and 48, there is repetition that Jacob is sick and that Joseph goes to visit him, suggesting that the episodes are some sort of doublet. Jacob even repeats the instructions for his burial, which

16. Although 12:26–31 forms its own complete episode, it also resumes from 11:1, creating a frame around the David, Bathsheba, and Nathan narratives. Therefore, we can consider ch. 13 to be in juxtaposition with the whole section of chs. 11–12, which consists of two narrative threads.

17. Many scholars have analysed this connection in detail. See, e.g., Jan P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses*. Vol. 1, *King David* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), 157–62; Robert M. Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History; Part Three—II Samuel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1993), 131; and Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Das zweite Buch Samuel: Ein narratologisch-philologischer Kommentar* (trans. J. Klein; BWANT 181; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2009), 114.

he first gave to Joseph, to his other sons in 49:28–32. However, the editor has chosen to depict these episodes as sequential by using the phrase אחרי הדברים האלה ("after these things") in 48:1. This forces the reader to consider ch. 48 as a consequence or development of Joseph's previous oath to Jacob despite the strong sense of repetition and parallel.

A consequential interpretation of the episodes in Gen 47:29–31 and 48:1–22 adds meaning to each of these episodes. First, the narratives of Abraham and Isaac also have two separate scenes where they confer requests or blessings in their old age. In Gen 24:1–9 Abraham asks his servant to swear that he will find a wife for Isaac outside of Canaan, and then in 25:1–6 it is reported that Abraham had more sons but left all he owned to Isaac. Similarly, in 27:1–40 Isaac mistakenly blesses Jacob rather than Esau, and then in 28:1–4 Isaac blesses Jacob again and sends him to find a wife.[18] The structure of sequential blessings/requests created by the time marker in 48:1 creates a parallel between Jacob/ Joseph and the accounts of the other patriarchs, who also deliver two rounds of blessings separated by a period of time. In particular, the parallels highlight the thematic continuity of the reversal of the order of inheritance. In both Abraham and Isaac's second round of blessing, they purposefully favour the second sons, Isaac and Jacob, just as Jacob deliberately reverses the order of Ephraim and Manasseh. This parallel, enhanced by the sequential structure, adds further depth of meaning to this intriguing reversal.

In contrast to the previous episode, Gen 48:1 reports that Joseph goes to visit Jacob without being summoned. This circumstance gains significance in sequence with the previous episode where Jacob specifically requests Joseph to come. Jacob's increasing passivity could be interpreted as due to his declining health,[19] except that he regains the strength to call the rest of his sons in Gen 49:1, making this unlikely. In Gen 47:29 Jacob has used phrases such as אם־נא מצאתי חן בעיניך ("if I have found favour in your eyes") and ועשית עמדי חסד ואמת ("deal with me with kindness and truth"), suggesting a reversal of roles between father and son and a reversal of the direction of blessing.[20] In consequence of

18. Furthermore, the servant placing his hand under Abraham's "thigh" when swearing the oath is echoed in Gen 47:29–31. Genesis 48:1–22 alludes to Isaac's instructions to Jacob to find a wife by mentioning Rachel, Paddan, and the use of the particular title for God אל שדי ("El-Shaddai"), also found in Gen 28:3.

19. E.g. Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 403.

20. In particular, אם־נא מצאתי חן בעיניך ("if I have found favour in your eyes") is most often used to address God (Abraham to God in Gen 18:3; Moses to God in

this, Joseph has confidence to approach Jacob without being summoned, certain of his position as favoured son.

Conversely, Joseph's approach to Jacob for a blessing adds balance to Jacob's words of deference to Joseph in Gen 47:29. If the audience is inclined to see Joseph as greater than his father after the first pericope, this is altered in the second, where he seeks Jacob's blessing and, moreover, must accept the reversal of his own sons. Jacob has received Joseph's oath and so may now exercise his own decision to reverse the order of Ephraim and Manasseh.

There is another link between these two episodes that affects their interpretation. Jacob calls only Joseph from among his twelve sons and asks him to swear that he will bury him in Canaan not Egypt. On one level, this suggests Joseph's special status, but, in light of Jacob's favourable blessing to Judah, one might wonder why he is not also summoned. However, Joseph was the only son with the power and possible inclination to bury Jacob in Egypt. Joseph has an Egyptian wife (41:50) and sons born in Egypt. Thus he is the son to whom Jacob needs to stress the importance of the land of Canaan. This is a further echo of Abraham's insistence in Gen 24:8 that, although he wants the servant to find a wife for Isaac outside Canaan, the wife must come to Canaan and Isaac must not leave the land. In consequence of Jacob's request, Joseph's act of bringing his sons unasked[21] takes on greater significance. The adoption of Joseph's sons as Jacob's own negates their Egyptian background and so continues the theme of the importance of Canaan. By bringing his sons, Joseph is responding to Jacob's request that he remember their home is in Canaan. Furthermore, this link illuminates Jacob's reminiscences in Gen 48:7 about Rachel and her death in childbirth. Rachel could have no more children, because of her early death, and so she now becomes Ephraim and Manasseh's new mother in replacement of their Egyptian mother.[22]

Exod 33:13 and 34:9; Gideon to God in Judg 6:17). Other occurrences include David to King Achish in 1 Sam 27:5; Jacob to Esau in Gen 33:10 when he brings many gifts in order to effect a reconciliation between them; and Laban to Jacob in Gen 30:26 where he specifically states that God has blessed him because of Jacob.

21. As read by Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 286. Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 459, 463, who says it was customary for all male heirs to come to the father's deathbed. However, in the narratives of Isaac, he summons each of the sons he wishes to bless.

22. Observed in Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis* (2d ed.; Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 198–99.

(iv) Similarly, in 2 Sam 1–2 there is continuity in character and location, and there is even little doubt about the chronological sequence of the episodes. However, there is no obvious chain of causality, and so the phrase אחרי־כן ("after this") is used in 2 Sam 2:1 to connect the two episodes and encourage the reader to search for causal continuity.

The episode in 2 Sam 2:1–4a in isolation is a story of David's strategic move to Hebron, where he is anointed king by the people of Judah. However, his reason for moving to Hebron at precisely this time is revealed by the previous episode, which reports the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, the king and his heir.

Furthermore, the pericope in 2 Sam 1 is reinterpreted by its consequences in 2 Sam 2. Second Samuel 1:18 becomes particularly significant, where it is reported that David taught his song of lamentation to the people of Judah. It seems likely that this verse is an unmarked prolepsis and refers to events after 2 Sam 2. However, the phrase אחרי־כן ("after this") in 2:1 encourages the reader to interpret ch. 2 as a consequence of the whole of ch. 1 including v. 18. David's song and his teaching it to the people of Judah demonstrate his innocence in the demise of Saul and Jonathan, and this occurs *before* he goes to Hebron to be made king. Appearances are important and he must be clear of any implication of guilt in the death of Saul.[23]

b. *Parallel and Synchronous Episodes*

The second type of juxtaposition between episodes is where they are not in chronological sequence, but there are thematic or character parallels between them. These parallels shape the way that each of the pericopes is interpreted and generate meaning in the overall pattern of episodes.

This type of juxtaposition is characterised by discontinuity in characters and locations in order to indicate there is also discontinuity in time.

(1) *Single synchronous or achronological episodes*. The first type of discontinuity lasts for only one episode and forms a temporary digression from the main line of the narrative. The episode will usually begin with a new place and new *dramatis personae*. If there is a time designation, it denotes a synchronism. These discontinuities indicate a discontinuity in character development, plot, causation, and consequences between the episodes.

23. Cf. P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel* (AB 9; New York: Doubleday, 1984), 64–65. McCarter argues for the apologetic nature of this section of 1–2 Samuel.

For example, Gen 38 begins with a shift to Judah as the central character, in contrast to the previous pericope where he is only one among the crowd of his brothers. He camps near the Adullamite Hirah, implying a new location, and the time designation, בעת ההוא ("at that time"), suggests a synchronism. In this case, the next episode in ch. 39 also starts with discontinuity. It reverts back to Joseph as the central character and reminds the audience of Joseph's geographical transition to Egypt in v. 1. This repetition in Gen 39:1 is commonly called a resumptive repetition and has been shown by Talmon to be a common indicator of synchronous episodes.[24] Thus ch. 38 stands alone as a synchronous episode that is interpreted in parallel to the pericopes surrounding it.[25]

Many commentators have noted the parallels between Gen 38 and the surrounding passages, and they have particularly emphasised that this story forms a parallel to the Joseph story as a whole.[26] Concerning its juxtaposition with ch. 37 and 39 in particular, Alter observes: both Jacob and Judah lose sons (although there is significant contrast between Jacob's extravagant grief at the end of ch. 37 and Judah's lack of responsiveness to the deaths of his sons in ch. 38); a kid from the flock and a garment are used to deceive both Jacob and Judah; the verbs to "recognise" (נכר, 37:32, 33, and 38:25, 26) and to "comfort" (נחם, 37:35 and 38:12) are used in both episodes; the verb "to go down" (ירד) appears at the beginning of chs. 38 and 39 to express each brother being separated from his family; Judah's sexual importunity in ch. 38 is in contrast to Joseph's restraint in ch. 39.[27]

24. Shemaryahu Talmon, "The Presentation of Synchroneity and Simultaneity in Biblical Narratives," in *Studies in Hebrew Narrative Art Throughout the Ages* (ed. J. Heinemann and S. Werses; ScrHier 27; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978), 9–26. Talmon argues that this is not only a sign of editorial work, it is also stylistic and a deliberate device for presenting synchronous material. See his article for many more examples of this device both between and within episodes.

25. Gen 38 has long been considered an independent narrative placed within the Joseph cycle because of these discontinuities (e.g. Speiser, *Genesis*, 299; Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 49).

26. Recognised long ago by the midrashic commentators (for a summary see Judah Goldin, "The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong," *JBL* 96 [1977]: 28–29). Some recent studies include: Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 3–12; A. Wildavsky, "Survival Must Not Be Gained Through Sin: The Moral of the Joseph Stories Prefigured Through Judah and Tamar," *JSOT* 62 (1994): 37–48; A. J. Lambe, "Judah's Development: The Pattern of Departure-Transition-Return," *JSOT* 83 (1999): 53–68; R. J. Clifford, "Genesis 38: Its Contribution to the Jacob Story," *CBQ* 66 (2004): 519–32; as well as Goldin, "Youngest Son," 27–44.

27. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 3–12, and Alter, *Genesis*, 217–23.

These parallels shape the meaning of the passage where discontinuity makes a chronologically sequential reading inappropriate. There is a sense of justice that Judah is deceived just as he deceived Jacob, and that he loses two sons when he deprived Jacob of one son. Furthermore, it offers hope to the narrative of ch. 37 because Judah regains two sons, and therefore Jacob will perhaps also regain his sons. Chapter 37 can thus be reinterpreted as the beginning of a story of hope, not just despair.[28] The episode is not chronologically sequential to Judah's deceit of Jacob, and therefore it is not presented as divine payback or vengeance, but rather as analogy. Judah does not lose his sons *because* he deceived Jacob, but rather the story conveys the irony that the deceiver can also be deceived.

Similarly, the parallels with ch. 39 affect each episode's interpretation. On the one hand, Joseph's flight from sexual temptation in ch. 39 is unambiguously appropriate after the troubles created by Judah's own inappropriate self-gratification in the previous chapter. On the other hand, ch. 38 demonstrates that good can come out of such a situation, regardless of the protagonist's actions, and so gives hope to Joseph's plight in Egypt. In one sense, Joseph is paralleled to Tamar for being the one who is more righteous, but, on the other hand, his actions are the opposite to hers: he is abstinent while she deceives her own father-in-law into sleeping with her.[29] Conversely, Judah is evaluated more harshly in ch. 37 when read adjacent to Joseph's exemplary actions in ch. 38.

The reversal of the primogeniture of sons throughout the book of Genesis, including the Joseph story, finds expression in ch. 38 at the birth of Perez and Zerah.[30] This theme is highlighted in ch. 38 by juxtaposition with ch. 37, where Jacob shows favour to his younger son Joseph over his older brothers. The parallel adds an interesting tension to the course

28. The character development and change of Judah in ch. 38 has been observed to parallel the entire story of Joseph. Joseph's character improves, as does the situation around him (see Lambe, "Judah's Development," 53–68). These two developments come together when both Joseph and Judah are given special blessings by Jacob in ch. 48.

29. See Wildavsky, "Survival," 42–43, who argues that Tamar goes against custom to bring about justice. Wildavsky argues for an overall parallel between the Tamar and Judah story, and the Joseph story that the survival of Israel will only be through moral actions.

30. Goldin, "Youngest Son," 27–44. Cf. Wildavsky, "Survival," 42, who suggests that the point of the story is that Tamar is fighting for the right of Judah's oldest deceased son to have an heir. However, it is just as likely that Tamar is fighting for her own right to have children, and so this does not negate the contribution of the birth of Judah's twins to this theme.

of the Joseph story at this early stage—in ch. 37 it is clear that Joseph is the favoured son yet Judah's line is described and his heirs are reversed, suggesting that Judah may in fact be the inheritor of the line of Jacob. As will later be revealed in Jacob's blessings, both sons are favoured with special blessings indicating that this tension is not entirely resolved even at the conclusion of the narrative. The Tamar and Judah story contains parallels to the story of Joseph as a whole, and it has parallels to the particular episodes with which it is juxtaposed. All these parallels affect our interpretation of the narrative.

As the story in Gen 38 progresses, it is apparent that the chapter is synchronous to the surrounding story line because it stretches over a long period of time, until the birth of Judah's grandchildren. However, other episodes with this type of discontinuity are not necessarily synchronous. Their chronology is ambiguous, and they may have occurred before, during, or after the surrounding events. For example, the story beginning in 2 Kgs 3:1 is discontinuous in time, place, and person from the previous episode, as the story leaps from Elisha's miracles to the reign of Jehoram. He may have succeeded to the throne before, after, or during the period in which Elijah ascended to heaven and Elisha was performing his miracles. Unless there is a time designation, the discontinuity indicates that the events cannot be *interpreted* chronologically, not necessarily that they did not *occur* chronologically.

(2) *Resumption of an earlier narrative thread*. Discontinuity in characters and location can also indicate that the narrative is resuming an earlier narrative thread. One example is Gen 20, which begins with a different person and location from ch. 19. After the three men visit Abraham in Mamre in 18:1–15, the story splits into two branches, each in chronological sequence with this episode. The story of Lot escaping from Sodom in ch. 19 flows directly on from Abraham's bargaining for Sodom and the two visitors in ch. 18. Then, in ch. 20 the narrative returns to Abraham (although there was also a brief return to him in 19:27–28) and gives a different branch of the narrative that is chronologically sequential to ch. 18. Abraham is journeying "from there" even though he has not been mentioned since Gen 19:27, where he was in the same location as he was in ch. 18. This geographical continuity with 18:1–15, rather than the end of ch. 19, suggests that, causally, ch. 20 follows from ch. 18. Moreover, there is explicit temporal discontinuity with ch. 19 as 19:36–38 has a prolepsis into the future when the daughters of Lot bear his children and he becomes the father of the Moabites and Ammonites in the future עד היום ("until today"). The discontinuity with ch. 19 suggests it should

be interpreted in parallel to this episode. There are two episodes that affect the interpretation of ch. 20: 18:1–15 in chronological sequence and 18:16–19:38 in thematic parallel.

Genesis 18 contains reiterations of the promise that Sarah will bear a child, and a date is finally given for this event—when the Lord returns in the same season of the next year, she will have a son (18:14). Sarah indicates her disbelief by laughing. Chapter 20 follows on from this in two important ways. First, considering that Abraham has been told that Sarah will give birth within a year, the act of treating Sarah as his sister demonstrates that Abraham, like Sarah, lacks faith that she will bear a son within that time period. Secondly, the assurance in 20:6 that Abimelech did not touch Sarah is important for establishing Abraham as Isaac's father when he is born within this time frame.

Although ch. 20 is interpreted in chronological sequence with 18:1–15, there are parallels with its juxtaposed episode in 18:16–19:38 that enhance its interpretation. The prayers in 18:23–33 and 20:17 form a parallel where Abraham has a prophetic role and intercedes on behalf of first Sodom, then Abimelech, so that they avoid judgment. God's prompting of Abraham to intercede in the second narrative, by contrast with the first, is interpreted as a sign of his willing mercy.[31] Another parallel is that, in both stories, foreigners are prevented from sexual sin by God. The people of Sodom are prevented by Lot's two visitors in 19:10 and Abimelech by a dream in 20:6–7. This parallel emphasises the theme mentioned above, that it is important Sarah was untouched by Abimelech and Isaac was definitely Abraham's child.

Finally, there is a parallel between Lot's incest with his daughters and Abraham's claim that Sarah is his sister. This circumstance reflects negatively on Abraham in ch. 20. Lot did not fulfil his duty to his daughters and find them husbands, and therefore they resort to incest with their father. Abraham's action is reprehensible for the opposite reason. A sexual relationship with his "sister" was in this case appropriate, but instead he uses this as an excuse not to be with Sarah, despite the promise of a son within a year. On the other hand, the parallel highlights that the lines of Lot and Abraham are continued without intermarrying with the people of Canaan. Abraham's children descend from Sarah, and Lot's line descends from him and his daughters. Although ch. 20 resumes an earlier episode and is synchronous with the end of ch. 19, its juxtaposition with 18:16–19:38 remains important for its interpretation.

31. See Zakovitch, "Juxtaposition," 515–16.

(3) *Partial continuity with a time marker indicating a synchronism.* Conversely, there are episodes that have continuity of characters and even locations, but the time designation indicates that the episodes occurred simultaneously not sequentially. They often begin with phrases introduced by כאשר ("when"), or a phrase such as ביום ההוא ("on that day") or בעת ההוא ("at that time"),[32] which refer back to an event in the previous episode to establish a synchronism.[33] There is chronological discontinuity, and the stories cannot be interpreted in terms of consequences or development. Rather, they offer parallel viewpoints, and their thematic similarities or differences affect each episode's interpretation. These time designations usually indicate that the narrative is exploring the same subject but now a different theme.

(i) For example, Gen 41:50–52 digresses from the main line of the narrative about plenty and famine in Egypt to report the birth of Joseph's sons. This is described by the phrase בטרם תבוא שנת הרעב ("before the year of the famine came") to indicate that a different theme is occurring at a simultaneous period of time for the same character.

Genesis 41:50 indirectly alludes to the previous pericope describing the abundance in the land of Egypt through the name derivation of Ephraim, כי־הפרני אלהים בארץ עניי (41:52; "for God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction"). Just as the land gives abundant fruit, so Joseph himself is blessed with children throughout these years. Thus this small pericope suggests that God is blessing Joseph alongside the land of Egypt. In turn, the parallel highlights that by blessing Egypt with abundance, God is blessing Joseph because it is the means by which he will acquire his power and wealth. The etymology for the name Manasseh

32. There is a similar phrase ביום הזה, which means "on this day" (see John Goldingay, "*Kayyôm hazzeh* 'on this very day', *kayyôm* "on the very day', *kāʿēt* 'at the very time'," *VT* 43 [1993]: 112–15), but it does not occur at the beginning of episodes in biblical narrative.

33. However, these phrases can also be used when chronological sequence is intended, and so the other aspects of continuity and discontinuity must also be considered. DeVries shows that, in narratives about the past, the designation ביום ההוא ("on that day") announces a synchronism, sequence, or the epitome (summarising statement) in the story (Simon J. DeVries, *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: Time and History in the Old Testament* [London: SPCK, 1975], Chapter 2). He also suggests that בעת ההוא ("at that time") indicates either a synchronism or temporal (but not logical) sequence (p. 41). Talmon, "Presentation," 11, lists בעת ההוא, ויהי בעת + an infinite verb, ויהי ב + an infinite or finite verb, ויהי כאשר + an finite verb, עד between two finite or infinite verbs, and והנה preceding or coming between two verbs as marking synchroneity. He suggests that texts can also use a *yiqtol–qatal* syntactical structure to mark a synchronism. However, this syntactical structure and some of the time phrases are rarely used between episodes.

provides a commentary on the simultaneous events, כי־נשני אלהים את־כל־עמלי ואת כל־בית אבי (41:51; "for God has made me forget all the trouble and all the house of my father"). Joseph's rise to prosperity has superseded the harm done to him by his brothers, and so in a sense he has forgotten his past life. Yet he has not completely forgotten his father's house, as his mention of it ironically implies. This prepares for the next scene when the years of famine arrive and he is reunited with his family.[34]

(ii) The time designation in the opening statement of 2 Sam 21 בימי דוד ("in the days of David") indicates that the episode takes place at some stage within the time frame of the book of 2 Samuel. Alongside this time designation, there is continuity of David's interests and no new place designation. Usually this chapter is interpreted as a part of the Samuel conclusion in 2 Sam 21–24 which, using a chiastic structure of non-sequential episodes, forms a summary conclusion of the entire book.[35] However, it ought not be overlooked that this episode is juxtaposed with ch. 20, and so this will also shape the way that it is interpreted.

Second Samuel 20 and 21 are linked by the common theme of the death of David's enemies. In both stories David's enemies are conveniently killed in an indirect way: in ch. 20, Amasa is killed by Joab, and Sheba is killed by the wise woman of Abel Beth Maacah; and in ch. 21, Saul's sons are killed because of the Gibeonites. Furthermore, in both stories, a body is left exposed (20:12 and 21:10) and there is some neglect on behalf of David. He is unable to control Joab in ch. 20, and he delays gathering the bones of Saul and his sons in ch. 21. These parallels highlight certain aspects of each narrative and affect the way that they are interpreted.

In ch. 20, Sheba leads a rebellion with the men of Israel against David, and David sends Abishai to pursue him. This episode can be interpreted as a contrast to the rebellion of Absalom where David fails to act early, causing a devastating civil war. Then, when this episode is followed by the story of Saul's sons in ch. 21, certain details take on greater significance. Sheba is a Benjaminite, the same tribe as Saul, and he leads Israel against Judah, just as Saul's son Ishbosheth does at the beginning of 2 Samuel.[36] This is not only the story of another rebellious man of

34. Von Rad describes this section as a completed picture of Joseph as an Egyptian before he is reunited with his family in the next section (von Rad, *Genesis*, 373–75).

35. See Gilmour, *Representing the Past*, 99–116, for detailed analysis of 2 Sam 21–24 as a summary of the books of Samuel.

36. Polzin also observes a link with 2 Sam 2 because of the similarities between Asahel's pursuit of Abner and Joab, and Abishai's pursuit of Sheba. He finds a

Israel but a continuation of the conflict between Saul's family and David, Israel and Judah, which was never fully dealt with by David. It is not that David has finally learnt to deal with rebellions quickly after the Absalom affair, but rather it is a reminder that David is still plagued by political troubles from the time of Saul.

This interpretation offers a different reading of other elements of this story. After Sheba initiates the rebellion, David first takes his concubines to Jerusalem. Then he commands Amasa, who was Absalom's former commander and therefore of questionable loyalty, to rally the men of Judah. Unsurprisingly, Amasa takes longer than the time given him, and David commands Abishai to do the job. Both of these delays suggest that David still has not learnt to act quickly against rebellion. Another aspect of this narrative reinterpreted by juxtaposition with ch. 21 is the murder of Amasa by Joab and the exposure of his body on the roadside. In ch. 21 David is explicitly reproached for not giving Saul's sons a proper burial, and so this interprets ch. 20. It suggests that David is reprehensible in Amasa's death too because Amasa is also not properly buried.

Conversely, the interpretation of ch. 21 is affected by its juxtaposition with ch. 20. There is a gap in this narrative regarding whether David is acting positively or negatively by killing Saul's sons. Is he acting piously by atoning for Saul's sons in response to the famine, or is he masking political expediency with the request of the Gibeonites?[37] There is a parallel with the elimination of David's enemies at the hands of others in the previous narrative and with David's suppression of Sheba, another Benjaminite. This pushes the reader in favour of a negative reading of the story. These two episodes, placed side by side, convey that David is neither open nor expedient in disposing of his enemies.

2. *Juxtaposition of Stories*

Some of the same principles apply to the juxtaposition of stories, but, as they are bigger entities and almost always marked by discontinuity, we address them separately here.

number of verbal parallels in addition to the thematic one (Polzin, *Samuel and Deuteronomist; Part Three*, 199). See also Arnold A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (WBC 11; Dallas: Word, 1989), 235, for an overview of Sheba's link with Benjamin and therefore possibly the Saulides.

37. See Walter Brueggemann, "2 Samuel 21–24: An Appendix of Deconstruction?," *CBQ* 50 (1988): 386.

a. *Recognising the Beginning of a New Story*
Episodes that begin a new story will usually begin with a new location and characters to indicate this discontinuity. Often the new section will also be marked by a summary formula indicating the number of years of someone's life or reign in leadership. There are many episodes throughout Genesis, Judges, Samuel, and Kings that begin with a summary formula in this way. They indicate that the narrative is starting afresh with the life of a new character, usually coinciding with a new linear development of plot and character. In the book of Genesis these formulae often coincide with a list of the generations linking the two sections of narrative. The summary formulae can also occur in the middle of someone's life rather than at the beginning or the end. For example, the formula for Saul's reign occurs in 1 Sam 13:1, even though he was introduced in ch. 9 and he will continue as king until ch. 31. However, it marks the position in the narrative where Samuel ceases to be the central character after his final lengthy speech in ch. 12. Chapter 13 also begins with a new place designation, Michmas, and thus there is discontinuity of persons, place, and time indicated by the summary formula of Saul's reign.

b. *Chronological Sequence of Stories*
The chronological sequence of stories is determined by the conventions of the particular book rather than by the combination of character, time, and location at the beginning of a new story. In most cases, the narrative leads one to assume that the stories are sequential, even if they have some small overlap. The stories in Genesis are mostly sequential because they concern each successive generation. Nevertheless, mathematical calculations reveal that there is some overlap, for example, between the Isaac and Jacob stories.[38] Although most readers assume that the judges are ordered sequentially, again calculations of the numbers suggests that the chronology is not as simple as it appears. The book of Kings offers more guidance because the shifts between the northern and southern kingdoms and the order of the kings are clearly announced in each opening formula.[39] Thus discontinuity between stories (unlike episodes) indicates the beginning of a new story, and sometimes both chronological and thematic interpretations are appropriate.

38. See George G. Nicol, "The Chronology of Genesis: Genesis XXVI 1–33 as 'Flashback'," *VT* 46 (1996): 332–33.

39. See Talmon, "Presentation," 9–10, on synchroneity in the structure of Judges and Kings.

3. *Summary of Part A: Introduction to the Juxtaposition of Narrative Units*

As we conclude this theoretical and methodological analysis of juxtaposition, it is worth pausing to give an overview of our proposed framework before we apply it to our case study on the Elisha cycle. Up to this point we have examined a breadth of examples from across the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic History. Now we will have the opportunity for deeper analysis in the Elisha cycle. This will highlight additional features of juxtaposition, while our compelling and original reading of the cycle will argue for the validity and utility of the theory examined here.

First, we have proposed that juxtaposition changes the interpretation of an episode. This change may be one of intensification or shift of emphasis, or it may be more radical and produce a contradictory meaning. The understanding that juxtaposition shapes the reading of narrative units can be traced back through the rabbis and second temple literature to inner-biblical interpretation. Thus we argue for intentionality in at least some examples of juxtaposition. This will be applied to the Elisha cycle when we look at the diachronic process of juxtaposition and propose that its editors deliberately shaped the meaning of its episodes by the arrangement.

Secondly, we have drawn upon aspects of literary theory on causation/consequences and Bakhtin's dialogism to understand more specifically how the "meaning" of something can change by placing it next to something else. By categorising these changes as causation/consequences, contradiction, corroboration, and question and answer, we have a framework for a sophisticated and thorough recognition of them.

Thirdly, on a practical level, we have identified literary features in the text that show us how to interpret the juxtaposed units of narrative. Dialogue between voices requires a common referent, and so we have argued that devices such as repeated words and parallel plots point to these objects of dialogue. Furthermore, analysis of the elements of continuity and discontinuity between the episodes guide us towards chronological and/or dialogical interpretation.

Part B

THE ELISHA CYCLE

Chapter 6

Introduction to the Elisha Cycle

The Elisha stories can be found in 1 Kgs 19:19–21; 2 Kgs 2:1–8:15; 13:14–19, 20–21, and another short appearance in 2 Kgs 9:1. These episodes are particularly suitable for analysis because their arrangement is not governed by chronology. Most of the stories have self-contained plot lines that do not rely upon previous or subsequent episodes for their beginning or end. One constraint was that the introduction to Elisha in 1 Kgs 19 and his commissioning in 2 Kgs 2 needed to be placed at the beginning of the collection, and Elisha's sickness in 2 Kgs 13:14–19 and death in 13:20–21 placed at the end. Furthermore, the second Shunammite episode in 2 Kgs 8:1–6 requires the other Shunammite episode in ch. 4 to be placed before it. Taking only plot into consideration, all the other episodes could have been placed in any order.

There are also few datable features in these stories. The only Israelite kings named are Jehoram in 2 Kgs 3:6, Jehu in 2 Kgs 9–10, and Joash in 2 Kgs 13. The Aramean kings Ben-Hadad and Hazael are named, but as there were two Ben-Hadads, one before and one after Hazael, the reference to him in 2 Kgs 6:24 does not limit where this episode is placed. The Hazael stories needed to be placed before Jehu's coup because he appears in this story. Jehoshaphat king of Judah is named in 2 Kgs 3 (although this is thought to be secondary), and so this episode needed to be placed before the appearance of his grandson Ahaziah in 2 Kgs 9. Thus 2 Kgs 3 needed to be placed before both the Jehu and Hazael stories. However, apart from these minor considerations, there is little governing the stories chronologically. Indeed, commentators have suggested that most of Elisha's ministry occurred during the time of Jehoahaz or Joash, despite their position in the book of Kings during the time of Jehoram.[1]

1. E.g. J. Maxwell Miller, "The Elisha Cycle and the Accounts of the Omride Wars," *JBL* 85 (1966): 454; Alexander Rofé, *The Prophetical Stories: The Narratives about the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, Their Literary Types and History* (2d ed.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 70–74.

Rofé suggests that word and subject associations governed the order of the episodes.[2] The episodes in ch. 4 are linked by women who call themselves maidservants. The episode about the poisonous stew follows the resurrection of the Shunammite's son because of the connection between death in the pot and death of a child. The multiplication of the loaves and poisonous stew are both episodes about food. The healing of Naaman was placed after the multiplication of loaves because in both stories Elisha receives bread as a gift. The miracle of the axe follows because it involves the Jordan River where Naaman was healed. The war at Dothan is after the miracle of the axe-head because of the same cry of despair. The episode at Dothan leads into the episode in Samaria because of the sieges. Rofé notes further that the end of the siege at Dothan contradicts the beginning of the episode in Samaria, so the order is clearly associative not logical. In 6:24–7:20 a woman in Samaria cries out to the king, and in the next story the Shunammite woman does the same, each in the context of a famine. In 8:1–6 it is stated four times that Elisha revived the dead, and in the following story Ben-Hadad's question about whether he will recover from his illness is repeated twice. Hazael's appointment leads to the story of Jehu's coup because both deal with officers who plot against their kings.[3]

Nevertheless, even if these word and subject associations were followed, alternative arrangements of the material were still possible. Many of the episodes mention food or healing or the Aramean threat, and so could have been placed next to each other. There are other recurring elements in the stories, such as servants, children, water, and death, which could have been used to associate adjacent episodes. Therefore, although such associations are clearly present in the arrangement and taken into consideration by the editors, we still may ask why this particular set of associations was made and what is their effect in the cycle's final form.

There was great flexibility for the editors in their arrangement of the cycle because they were not restricted by the demands of chronological sequence to make sense of their material. They were able to juxtapose the episodes according to how they wished to interpret them and, in so doing, often changed the way that episodes would have been read independently or in a prior collection.

2. With the exception of the first (1 Kgs 19) and last episodes (2 Kgs 13), which were placed in their positions for chronological reasons (Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 49–50).

3. Ibid., 50–51.

In order to understand juxtaposition as a process, as well as in a synchronic study, we will look at what is discoverable of the redaction history of the Elisha cycle. There is not yet a consensus in scholarship about what were the pre-existing collections, how these collections came together, or how, when, or by whom the stories came to be in the Deuteronomistic History of the books of Kings. We are primarily conducting a synchronic study, and diachronic results will be used in service of this. Therefore, wherever possible, it is better to rely upon the results of other studies and accepted propositions than to argue for a new redaction history. We will look at the broad outline of previous studies and determine whether there are parameters that have achieved some consensus and that can be used profitably with minimal controversy.

First, it is probable that the Elisha traditions were not collected all at once but rather there were several pre-existing collections. These contained stories arising out of similar or identical circles, social contexts, or authors.

One commonly suggested pre-existing collection contained the stories in 2 Kgs 2; 4:38–44, and 6:1–7, probably also the episodes in 1 Kgs 19:19–21 and 2 Kgs 13:20–21; and finally 2 Kgs 4:8–37 was added at a later date.[4] We will call these the wonder story collection because they

4. This corresponds most closely with the first strand in the Elisha stories identified in Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (trans. D. Green; London: SPCK, 1970), 234. To this he adds only 4:1–7, which we will demonstrate to be a significantly later addition to these stories. It is also similar to the collection proposed by A. Šanda, *Die Bücher der Könige. II. Das zweite Buch der Könige* (EHAT 9/2; Münster: Aschendorff, 1912), 78–79, who includes all these episodes except 1 Kgs 19:19–21 but adds 2 Kgs 13:14–19. He agrees that 4:1–37 and 8:1–6 were added later, although he suggests these all arose from one author. David Jobling, "The Syrians in *The Book of the Divided Kingdoms*: A Literary/Theological Approach," *BibInt* 11 (2003): 535, proposes that chs. 2, 4, and 6:1–7 all emerge from the same social context of peasant polemics against the elite. Simon J. DeVries, *Prophet against Prophet: The Role of the Micaiah Narrative (I Kings 22) in the Development of Early Prophetic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 117–23, has an "early" and "later" legitimation (of Elisha) collection consisting of 1 Kgs 19, 2 Kgs 2:1–18, 2:23–25, 4:8–37, 5:1–27, 8:1–6 in the former and 2:19–22, 4:1–7, 4:38–44, 6:1–7 in the latter. Taking these collections together, it differs from the one proposed here by the addition of 4:1–7 and 8:1–6, which we consider later. Hermann-Josef Stipp, *Elischa–Propheten–Gottesmänner: Die Kompositionsgeschichte des Elischazyklus und verwandter Texte, rekonstruiert auf der Basis von Text- und Literarkritik zu 1 Kön 20.22 und 2 Kön 2–7* (ATSAT 24; St Ottilien: Eos, 1987), 442–51, groups chs. 2 and 4 but omits the episode in 6:1–7. Hans-Christoph Schmitt, *Elisa: traditionsgeschichtliche Unversuchungen zur vorklassischen nordisraelitischen Prophetie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1972), 153–61, divides

are predominately miracle stories from the life of the prophet Elisha and contain little or no political or national significance.

Another likely pre-existing collection of stories is an Aramean collection containing 2 Kgs 5:1–14; 6:8–23; 6:24–7:20; 8:7–15, and 13:14–19. These narratives all contain conflict with the Arameans and feature Elisha in a political context. Several scholars have proposed such a collection but differ on which stories ought to be included.[5]

Although it is not certain, the evidence suggests that these two collections were brought together before they were incorporated into the book of Kings.

them along different lines: the wonder stories in 4:8–37 and 6:8–23 were joined to the Gilgal collection in 4:1–7; 4:38–41, and 6:1–7, in which the sons of the prophets appear. He considers the succession stories to be a separate collection. Even if they were originally a separate collection, the locations of the stories demonstrate that they were joined to the wonder stories/Gilgal collection at an early stage. Finally, Ernst Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige* (ATD 11/2l; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 366–68, proposes a collection of wonder stories in 2:19–25 (not including later redactional work); ch. 4; 6:1–7, and 8:1–6.

5. DeVries, *Prophet Against Prophet*, 117–23, proposes an early Syrian war collection with 6:8–7:20; 8:7–15, and a later Syrian war collection in 13:14–21, which was compiled after the Jehu accession was edited. Fohrer (*Introduction*, 234) and Stipp (*Elischa*, 463–80) also group these stories together but do not think that they ever formed a collection. Rather they remained independent until they were added to the other stories. Schmitt (*Elisa*, 173–79) proposes an Aramean collection but does not include 6:7–23 and 6:24–7:20 in it, and also suggests that each story remained independent until it was added into the book of Kings. Šanda (*Könige*, 2:82–86) does not consider them a collection but considers all these episodes to be from separate traditions from the other stories, and, in particular, that 2 Kgs 8:7–15 did not derive from 1 Kgs 19:15–18 but was pre-existing in the Elisha stories. I argue that the Aramean stories were in fact an existing collection, not independent, for three reasons. First, the extent of similarities between them makes it very likely that the stories arose in the same context: the Aramean conflict (see the section on 2 Kgs 5 [p. 152, below] for justification that this chapter contains conflict), the despair of the Israelite king, and the involvement of Elisha in political affairs. Secondly, there is development in the relations between the Israelite king and Elisha, and the Aramean king and Elisha. At first, in 2 Kgs 5:1–14 Elisha must approach the Israelite king, and the Arameans are told of him by the Israelite servant girl; then, in 8:7–15 the Arameans know of him well; and finally, in 13:14–21 the Israelite king runs directly to him. Thirdly, the final episode in 13:14–21 gives a nice conclusion to the collection by relating Elisha on his deathbed, offering some biographical information, and then offering a conclusion to the ongoing Aramean threat. Also, to some extent, Elisha is introduced in 2 Kgs 5:3 by the girl's words to Naaman's wife. Thus the stories would have hung well together in an independent collection.

The story of provision of oil to the widow in 4:1–7 contains signs of being written later, as do the sequel to the Shunammite story now found in 8:1–6, and the expansion to the Naaman episode in 5:15–27. Finally, the story of the Moabite war in 3:4–27 was probably the last episode to be added.[6] These final insertions were probably made when the Elijah cycle and the Elisha cycle were combined. This may have formed an independent collection, or alternatively they were both independently placed within the book of Kings when the Deuteronomic editing in 3:1–3 and the insertion of the Jehu story took place.[7]

The process of compiling the Elisha cycle was undoubtedly more complex than what has been described here and would have included editorial work within the episodes, as well as in their arrangement. Using these broad parameters of two main collections combined with several more independent episodes, we will examine what the former interpretations of the episodes may have been before they were placed in their final form. At the very least, this will demonstrate how the interpretation of episodes can be transformed when placed in a new context, even if we are not able to describe with complete accuracy the process behind the formation of the Elisha cycle.

6. The evidence for these being later stories will be discussed when each episode is analysed separately.

7. Noth, followed by many subsequent commentators, suggested that the cycle of Elisha stories was incorporated by the Deuteronomist into the book of Kings as a pre-existing collection; see, e.g., Martin Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien: Die sammelnden und bearbeitenden Geschichtswerke im alten Testament* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1943), 120–22, 125–26; James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Kings* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951), 38–41; and John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1964), 32. More recently, it has been proposed that some sections of the cycle were inserted after the Deuteronomistic editing; see, e.g., Miller, "Elisha Cycle," 449–53; and S. L. McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History* (VTSup 42; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 81–100. See too the summary of other theories in G. N. Knoppers, "Theories of the Redaction(s) of Kings," in *The Books of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception* (ed. André Lemaire and Baruch Halpern; VTSup 129; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 80. Arguments in favour of this theory include: some of the episodes contradict Deuteronomic historical or theological ideologies; there is no evidence of Deuteronomistic language and editing; and the Deuteronomistic chronology is broken. However, it is just as likely the Deuteronomist would have included material that did not entirely conform with the overall message, as a later editor would retain Deuteronomic material which did not conform with his/her message.

Chapter 7

Analysis of Episodes in the Elisha Cycle

1. *1 Kings 19:19–21*

Elisha's entrance in 1 Kgs 19:19–21 is the first Elisha episode, excluding a brief allusion to him in 1 Kgs 19:16. First Kings 19:19–21 introduces him and explains his presence in 2 Kgs 2:1. It is likely that the episode was originally joined to 2 Kgs 2 with the function of explaining the beginning of Elisha's ministry and how he came to accompany the prophet Elijah.[1] The episodes are bound together by the motif of the mantle, and 19:19–21 explains why Elisha accompanies Elijah on his journey from Gilgal. Many scholars agree that the episodes in 1 Kgs 19:19–21 and 2 Kgs 2:1–18 belong together in the Elisha cycle.[2]

1. E.g. Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 232. Cf. McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings*, 82, suggests that it was written later to join the Elijah and Elisha stories together and replace an original conclusion to Elijah in 1 Kgs 19:1–18. Note that, in this case, it would still have been juxtaposed with 2 Kgs 2. Marsha White, *The Elijah Legends and Jehu's Coup* (BJS 311; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 41–42, argues that 1 Kgs 19:19–21 and 2 Kgs 2 were composed along with the rest of 1 Kgs 19 to cast Elijah as a Moses figure in response to the Jehu narratives in 2 Kgs 9–10. Although this is unlikely because of the close links with the Elisha stories (which we will argue shortly), again the two episodes would have still been originally juxtaposed.

2. E.g. Hugo Gressman, *Die älteste Geschichtsschreibung und Prophetie Israels: (Von Samuel bis Amos und Hosea)* (2d ed.; SAT 2/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921), 234; Fohrer, *Introduction*, 234; DeVries, *Prophet against Prophet*, 117–23; Claude Coulot, "L'investiture d'Élisée par Élie (1R 19, 19–21)," *RSR* 57 (1983): 81–87. One alternative is that 1 Kgs 19:19–21 and 2 Kgs 2 belong to neither cycle but were written when the Elisha and Elijah stories were joined together (Schmitt, *Elisa*, 116; Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 276, 366). However, as we will argue, particularly 2 Kgs 2 was part of a chiasmic structure in the earliest collection of Elisha stories. The other alternative is that they were originally a part of the Elijah cycle. Elijah's ascent into heaven is the central pivot point of the story, particularly as the events surrounding it mirror one another. Furthermore, 2 Kgs 2:1

There are also connections between 1 Kgs 19:19–21 and the episode in 1 Kgs 19:1–18. Elijah is told to anoint Elisha in 19:16, Elijah's mantle appears in both v. 13 and v. 19, and the verb "to kiss" (נשק) is repeated in v. 18 and v. 20. The strong parallels between Elijah and Moses in 19:1–18 are also a connection to 19:19–21 (and incidentally 2 Kgs 2), which contains more subtle echoes of Moses and Joshua.[3] However, many commentators propose that 1 Kgs 19:1–18 was written later than the other Elijah stories, either during or after the time that the Elisha cycle was joined to the Elijah cycle.[4] Therefore, despite links between 19:1–18

foreshadows Elijah's ascension, highlighting it as the climax of the story to which the reader looks forward (Joachim Conrad, "2 Kön 2,1–18 als Elija-Geschichte," in *"Wünschet Jerusalem Frieden": Collected Communications to XIIth Congress of International Organization for Study of the Old Testament, Jerusalem, 1986* [ed. M. Augustin and K. D. Schunck; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1988], 263–71). Nevertheless, there is good reason to consider the story primarily about Elisha. Although Elijah's ascent is the subject of every part of this story, it is Elisha who is present in every scene and a partner in every dialogue, and his succession also stands at the climax of the story (Hartmut N. Rösel, "2 Kön 2:1–18 als Elija- oder Elischa-Geschichte," *BN* 59 [1991]: 33–36). Furthermore, the journey of Elisha continues in 2:19–25 when he revisits Bethel, and these stories concern exclusively Elisha and not Elijah.

3. The parallels between Moses and Elijah in 1 Kgs 19 include: Elijah goes 40 days and 40 nights to the mountain of God at Horeb without food, just as Moses spends 40 days and nights on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:18), experiences a theophany in Horeb (Exod 3) and goes without food 40 days and nights on Sinai (Exod 34:28); Elijah hides his face during the theophany in 1 Kgs 19:13, just as Moses does in Exod 3; there is fire and an earthquake (1 Kgs 19:12), just as there is in Exod 19:18 (listed also in Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 10; New York: Doubleday, 2001], 456–57). In 2 Kgs 2, Elijah and Elisha cross the Jordan, just as Joshua does (and Moses crosses the Red Sea). In 1 Kgs 19:21, Elisha serves Elijah (וישרתהו, "and he served him"), just as Joshua is called the משרת ("servant") of Moses in Exod 24:13; 33:11; Num 11:28, and Josh 1:1. For another detailed analysis of parallels, see White, *Jehu's Coup*, 3–11.

4. On the one hand there is explicit mention of Jehu, Hazael, and Elisha, presuming knowledge of the Elisha cycle and the later additions of the Jehu story. Then, on the other hand, there is a dependency on the narrative of 1 Kgs 16:31–34, and ch. 18 and the conflict with Jezebel, Ahab, and the worshippers of Baal. Thus 19:1–18 knows both the Elijah and Elisha cycles and was probably added to foreshadow the anointing of Jehu (which I will argue is also later). Commentators who believe 19:1–18 were written later include Montgomery, *Book of Kings*, 315; and Georg Hentschel, *2 Könige* (NeuEchtBAT 11; Würzburg: Echter, 1985), 118–19. Also White, *Jehu's Coup*, 41–42, argues that all the Elijah stories, including 19:19–21 and ch. 2, were composed as preparation for the Jehu story. This is confirmed by the absence of any links between 19:19–21 and the rest of the Elijah

and 19:19–21, we will interpret 19:19–21 as originally part of the Elisha cycle, not the Elijah cycle, and at one time juxtaposed with 2 Kgs 2:1–18.

In the current form of the MT, the episode in 19:19–21 is placed after Elijah's encounter with God in 1 Kgs 19:1–18 and before the war with King Hadad in 1 Kgs 20. There is a different order in the LXX, where this episode is juxtaposed with 1 Kgs 21 instead of 1 Kgs 20. Our interpretation of this short episode changes depending on which of these episodes it is juxtaposed with. Therefore, we can chart the interpretation and reinterpretation of this episode as it is read independently and then placed in three different contexts.

a. *Read Independently and with 2 Kings 2*

The episode in 1 Kgs 19:19–21 in its final form begins with וילך משם ("and he went from there"), which implies a connection to 19:1–18. However, it is possible that the story originally had another opening clause explaining where משם ("from there") referred to (e.g. the introduction to Elijah the Tishbite in 1 Kgs 17:1 which would explain where he originated from אליהו התשבי מתשבי גלעד, "Elijah the Tishbite from the inhabitants of Gilead"). Thus וילך משם may not be a redactional link[5] but rather originally described Elijah's journey from another location no longer preserved in the text. No destination is named, but Elijah has gone there with the specific intention of finding Elisha, and so presumably it is Elisha's hometown. We do not know where this hometown is from the episode, only that Elisha has a father named Shaphat, a mother, and twelve pairs of oxen, a great number.[6]

In this episode, Elijah mysteriously throws his mantle upon Elisha, an action Elisha does not question. Interpreters have observed that handing over clothing indicates the appointment of a successor.[7] For example, in Num 20:25–28 God commands Moses to strip Aaron of his garments and

stories. Most notably, in the next Elijah story in 1 Kgs 21, Elisha has mysteriously disappeared, suggesting they are separate traditions.

5. DeVries, *1 Kings*, 238–39. Cf. Hentschel, *2 Könige*, 120, similar to our suggestion here, believes the scene has been dislocated from its original context.

6. E.g. Montgomery, *Book of Kings*, 315, and Cogan, *1 Kings*, 455, read this as implying considerable wealth. Cf. DeVries, *1 Kings*, 239, who says that all the teams come from the village and it is communal work.

7. E.g. Montgomery, *Book of Kings*, 316; Hentschel, *2 Könige*, 120; Wesley J. Bergen, *Elisha and the End of Prophetism* (JSOTSup 286; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 50; Cogan, *1 Kings*, 455. Coulot, "L'investiture," 88, cites David's taking of Saul's cloak as taking his personality and rights from him and thus argues that the willing transfer of the mantle also transfers his rights, personality, spirit, and function.

to clothe his son Eleazar in them. Aaron then dies immediately, and Eleazar takes his role as priest from that point onwards. First Samuel 18:4 is a little less clear, but presumably Jonathan hands David his clothing to demonstrate that David is now the heir of Saul. Immediately after this takes place, David assumes this role, does Saul's errands, and prospers. In these examples the role is transferred immediately when the successor puts on the clothing. In contrast, Elisha follows Elijah and serves him (וישרתהו), but he does not necessarily become Elijah's successor as prophet.[8] In the context of this story alone, it is unclear what role Elisha is being summoned to, whether a servant to follow Elijah or a prophet to function independently. Elijah's act of throwing the mantle suggests one interpretation, and Elisha's actions in the course of the story suggest another.

The ambiguity of Elijah's action is compounded by the ambiguity of his reply to Elisha when he asks to kiss his parents: כי מה־עשיתי לך ("for what have I done for/to you?"). We will consider two possible interpretations of this question: the first corresponding to the interpretation of the mantle as a summons to follow Elijah; the second to the interpretation of the mantle as a command to go and take Elijah's place.

The dominant interpretation is that Elijah is testing Elisha's loyalty or that he is concerned about Elisha's commitment. Elijah perceives hesitation in Elisha's request to say goodbye to his father and mother, and so he challenges his commitment. The translation and precise understanding of Elijah's question varies among the scholars who understand it as a test of Elisha's commitment, either direct or indirect. One suggestion is that the implied answer to כי מה־עשיתי לך ("for what have I done for you?") is "nothing." Elijah is denying that he appointed Elisha in order to test his commitment.[9] It is suggested that when Elisha does not go to his parents, but instead slaughters his livelihood, he has passed Elijah's test.[10] Gray interprets כי as adversative "*but* (remember) what I have done to you." This reading suggests that Elijah is concerned that Elisha will not return, yet allows him to go as an act of leniency.[11] A more plausible reading of this question, with a similar overall interpretation, is suggested by looking at similar usages of מה־עשיתי לך. When עשה is used in the *qatal* in this construction, it usually implies that something bad has happened or that the person is accused of doing something bad.

8. Long, *1 Kings*, 205, also observes that apart from the Joshua parallel, it is not a question of Elisha becoming a disciple but his attendant.

9. E.g. DeVries, *I Kings*, 239; Cogan, *1 Kings*, 455.

10. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 368; Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 233.

11. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 367–68.

For example, in Gen 20:9 it is paralleled with מה־חטאתי לך ("how have I sinned against you"), and in Mic 6:3 it is paralleled with מה הלאתיך ("how have I wearied you").[12] It is therefore natural to read Elijah's words as, "what bad thing have I done to you that you want to go back to your parents?" Elijah is concerned about Elisha's commitment, but evidently he relents, allowing him to return to his parents before following him.

A problem with this interpretation is that Elisha's request to kiss his parents does not read as a delaying tactic. Elisha must run after Elijah (וירץ אחרי אליהו, "and he ran after Elijah") after receiving the mantle, implying that Elijah had no intention of giving Elisha a sufficient opportunity to follow him. Unlike typical scenes of anointing in the Bible where an oracle is given, Elisha does not even have time to disengage himself from his oxen before Elijah has departed.

Furthermore, the request to kiss his parents is more likely a request to follow Elijah than a request to delay his new role.[13] Kissing his parents is a way of asking their blessing before he leaves them. This reading is suggested by Gen 27:26, when Isaac tells his son to come and kiss him before Isaac blesses him and dies. Similarly, in Gen 31:28 Laban complains that he was not given the chance to kiss his sons and daughters before they left.[14] The action evidently indicated that a child would be separated from his/her parents. Therefore, Elisha's intention to kiss his parents was an announcement that he intended to leave them and follow Elijah. Second Kings 2 confirms this interpretation when Elijah is repeatedly called Elisha's master (אדני) and Elisha calls to Elijah אבי אבי ("my father, my father"). Elijah has taken the position of Elisha's father, and Elisha appropriately kisses his own father goodbye before following his new master. There is no other information in the story suggesting that Elisha's loyalty could not be trusted or that Elijah was concerned with testing him. To the contrary, every other aspect of the story suggests Elisha was eager to follow Elijah.[15]

12. See also Exod 32:21; Num 22:28; 23:11.

13. I wonder if these commentators are unduly influenced by New Testament passages such as Luke 14:26 and Matt 8:21–22.

14. John Davies, *1 Kings* (EP Study Commentary; Darlington: Evangelical, 2012). Cf. Cogan, *1 Kings*, 455, who compares the action to Laban kissing his sons and daughters in Gen 31:28, but instead concludes that it is indicative of his nurturing ministry.

15. Also argued in Paul J. Kissling, *Reliable Characters in the Primary History: Profiles of Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha* (JSOTSup 224; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 152.

An alternative interpretation is that Elijah is telling Elisha to return, not because he is concerned about his commitment, but because he genuinely does not want or intend for him to follow him. Elisha has either misunderstood the meaning of throwing the mantle upon him, or he has deliberately chosen to follow Elijah, even though that was not Elijah's intention. As observed earlier, usually a transfer of clothing indicates the transfer of a role, not a call to follow someone. According to the pattern of Num 20 and 1 Sam 18, Elijah throws the mantle on Elisha to indicate that Elisha is now the prophet in Israel, not Elijah. The transfer of roles is immediate and does not involve the successor first accompanying his predecessor. However, in a twist to the plot, Elisha responds by insisting upon following Elijah rather than departing as the new prophet in Israel. Thus Elijah asks "for what have I done to you [that you are following me]?" to indicate that Elisha has (deliberately?) misunderstood him.[16] Elijah's implied answer to this question is, "I have given you my mantle which indicates you are now the prophet in Israel not me."

One problem with this interpretation is that after Elijah has told Elisha to return (שוב), it is immediately reported that he does in fact "return" (וישב), and so if Elijah wanted Elisha to leave him, it would seem that there is a comic miscommunication between them. Elisha goes back as Elijah commanded, but he does not go back to be the new prophet in Israel in Elijah's place. Rather he makes an even more overt display of commitment to Elijah and returns to following him. Furthermore, no reason is given within these few verses to suggest that Elijah would not want Elisha to follow him.

Neither of these interpretations is without problems. Reading the episode in isolation, the first interpretation, that Elijah is testing Elisha, is more plausible. This is partly demonstrated by its popularity among commentators. By concluding the episode with the outcome that Elisha is following Elijah with no more protestations from Elijah, the reader is inclined to consider this a positive ending to the story because there is no more information to the contrary. Moreover, from this short episode, we deduce that Elijah is a man of great note. This inclines us to assume he is a man who demands great loyalty rather than a man who is alarmed at the idea that Elisha will follow him. Our preference for this interpretation will change when the story is read in dialogue with the surrounding

16. Bergen, *Elisha*, 51, also suggests that Elijah does not want to be followed but instead replaced as prophet. His reading follows the interpretation of the words by Coulot, "L'investiture," 90, who parallels them with 1 Sam 26:18 and 1 Sam 29:8 where it is an expression of innocence. Coulot himself (pp. 89–90) argues that Elijah is saying that he has passed on the role to Elisha but that he himself is not the instigator in this.

stories and there are reasons for Elijah intending Elisha to replace him as prophet instead of following him.

Read with 2 Kgs 2, the second interpretation that Elijah does not want Elisha to follow him becomes more plausible. First, the fact that the mantle is again in the hands of Elijah suggests that his gesture in 1 Kgs 19:19 was not successful or not taken to completion. Although Elisha followed him, he did not accept the mantle and it was returned to Elijah. Now, in 2 Kgs 2:13 it falls upon Elisha when Elijah has ascended, and there is a clearer act of succession than 1 Kgs 19. This is confirmed when Elisha uses the mantle to part the Jordan, just as Elijah did. This also points to the mantle's key role in the succession. Thus Elijah flinging his mantle upon Elisha in 1 Kgs 19:19 is now unambiguously appointing him as an independent successor because that is what it means in 2 Kgs 2. Here Elisha *does* take on the prophetic role immediately, according to the pattern of the transfer of clothing in the Bible. In 1 Kgs 19:19–21 Elisha follows Elijah from his own initiative, not because he is accepting Elijah's mantle and the prophetic role.

Furthermore, 2 Kgs 2 repeats the scenario of Elisha trying to follow Elijah but Elijah telling him to go away. Again, there is no question at any stage about Elisha's loyalty, especially after his commitment in 1 Kgs 19:19–21. Elisha gives every indication that he will always stay close to Elijah. Instead, there is a difference in understanding: Elijah wants Elisha to pursue his own course as prophet, but Elisha perceives that the succession is not yet complete and wishes to follow him as a servant.

Elijah's cryptic statement, מה־עשיתי לך, is interpreted by 2 Kgs 2, where he repeats an almost identical question in the future tense in v. 9, מה אעשה־לך. If we accept the interpretation that Elijah wants Elisha to leave him and be prophet in his place, then this question is uttered in a parallel circumstance to 1 Kgs 19:19. In both stories, Elijah does not want Elisha to follow him, yet Elisha makes a declaration that he will not leave him. When this question is asked in the future tense in 2 Kgs 2, it suggests a reason why Elisha insists on following Elijah and why he does not accept the succession as complete: he wants to inherit Elijah's spirit (ויהי־נא פי־שנים ברוחך אלי, "let me have a double portion of your spirit").[17] The mantle is not sufficient for Elisha to conduct his own

17. According to the Rabbis, Elisha received twice the spirit of Elijah and so Elijah performed eight miracles and Elisha sixteen (see Rashi on 2 Kgs 3:1). However, the only other instance of the phrase פי שנים is in Deut 21:17, where it refers to the double portion given to the eldest son. Therefore commentators argue that Elisha is asking for the status as rightful heir, and he wants twice as much spirit

prophetic ministry, and this is why he persists in following Elijah. The repetition of the question highlights that the situation has now changed and Elisha will be ready to accept the succession.

Reading 1 Kgs 19:19–21 with 2 Kgs 2 answers a number of other questions left open in the short episode. The extensive Moses and Joshua parallels in 2 Kgs 2 encourage the reader to notice the verb וישרתהו ("and he served him") in 1 Kgs 19 and recognise that it echoes Joshua's role as Moses' attendant (משרת, "servant"). Just as Joshua served Moses before succeeding him, so also Elisha is Elijah's servant before taking his place as prophet.

Read in isolation, this story only describes Elisha following Elijah and serving him, it does not describe what sort of ministry he will have. Read with 2 Kgs 2, it suggests that Elisha is succeeding Elijah as a wonder worker in Israel. Elisha giving the ox meat to the people foreshadows several stories where Elisha will provide food in these wonder stories: providing oil to the widow, multiplying loaves for the sons of the prophets, purifying the stew, and rescuing Samaria from the Aramean siege and subsequent famine.

b. *Read with 1 Kings 19:1–18*

A different picture of Elisha's role as Elijah's successor emerges when this episode is read in juxtaposition with 1 Kgs 19:1–18. In 1 Kgs 19:16 God gives instructions to Elijah to anoint Elisha in his place (תחתיך) with the purpose in v. 17 that, והיה הנמלט מחרב חזאל ימית יהוא והנמלט מחרב יהוא ימית אלישע ("the one who escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill and the one who escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill"). This creates an expectation that Elisha will destroy Baal worship in Israel through violent means. His succession to Elijah anticipates a prophetic ministry in which he will work to restore the people of Israel to their God and will engage in political affairs. In light of this, it is difficult to interpret Elisha's slaughter of the oxen. On the one hand, the violence is reminiscent of his task as slaughterer of Baal worshippers, particularly

as any other heir, not twice as much as Elijah (e.g. Gressman, *Die älteste Geschichtsschreibung*, 284–85; Robert P. Carroll, "Elijah–Elisha Sagas: Some Remarks on Prophetic Succession Ancient Israel," *VT* 19 [1969]: 405; T. Raymond Hobbs, *2 Kings* [WBC 13; Waco: Word, 1985], 21; Hentschel, *2 Könige*, 9; Maeijer, *Elisha as a Second Elijah*, 16–17). Gressman and Maeijer assert that therefore Elisha received two-thirds of Elijah's spirit. However, this is only the case if there were two sons. As there is no mention of anyone else who could be considered an heir, and the sons of the prophets say in 2:15 unambiguously that the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha, we take this to mean Elisha is the heir rather than it being a mathematical formula for calculating the proportion of Elijah's spirit that Elisha inherits.

because of the association of an ox, which the worshippers slaughter in their contest with Elijah in 1 Kgs 18:25. On the other hand, he gives the meat to "the people" לעם. This action is generous and almost a contradiction with the image of Elisha's role slaughtering Baal worshippers in 19:17. This tension prepares the reader for the unexpected direction Elisha's ministry takes as he spends more time rescuing people and feeding them than slaughtering the unfaithful as foretold in 19:1–18. Already there is a tension with 19:1–18 that will be developed further in the episodes after 19:19–21.

While 1 Kgs 19:1–18 alters our perception of Elisha's role as prophet, it also points towards an interpretation of Elijah's words, לך שוב כי מה־עשיתי לך, as a genuine command not to follow him. God tells Elijah to anoint Elisha "in his place," suggesting that Elisha is to take Elijah's role, not to become his servant.

This juxtaposition adds further complexity to our understanding of Elisha's role as Elijah's successor by associations between the two episodes. In 19:13 Elijah uses his mantle to cover his face when he encounters God. By giving this same item of clothing to Elisha, he infers that Elisha may soon encounter God and therefore need the mantle to cover his face too. Elisha will be the prophetic mediator just as Elijah was. In the final arrangement of the book of Kings, 19:19–21 is separated from the Moses and Joshua parallels in 2 Kgs 2. However, there are also Moses parallels in 1 Kgs 19:1–19 that draw the reader's attention to Elisha's role as Elijah's servant, just as Joshua served Moses. Even after separating 19:19–21 from the rest of the Elisha cycle, he is still presented as a "second" Joshua because of this juxtaposition.

Another link is made between 19:1–18 and 19:19–21 by the repetition of the verb נשק ("to kiss") in v. 18 and v. 20. Elisha's request to kiss his parents becomes even more pious because it is in contrast to those who kiss Baal, the very people he is meant to kill. Elisha has promising potential as the one who will purge Israel of its unfaithfulness.

Finally, 1 Kgs 19:1–18 provides a reason why Elijah would want Elisha to return and not to follow him (as per our second interpretation). Throughout the Elijah cycle, and particularly in 19:1–18, Elijah has demonstrated an unwillingness to acknowledge others who have remained faithful to God. Despite the report that Obadiah has hidden a hundred prophets of God in 1 Kgs 18:13, Elijah still insists in 18:22; 19:10, and 14 that he is the only prophet left.[18] Not only is Elijah a loner,

18. This juxtaposition is also observed in Olley, "Yhwh and His Zealous Prophet," 37. Interestingly, he suggests Elijah's attitude is that a true prophet should be confrontational but that the narrator disagrees with this judgment.

1 Kgs 19:1–18 suggests that he would willingly give up his role as prophet. He has received a threat to his life from Jezebel (19:2), he feels inadequate and wants to die (19:4), and twice he tells the Lord that he is alone and fears for his life (19:10, 14). Thus the idea is reinforced that Elijah willingly gives up his role as prophet and does not want to have Elisha as his apprentice.[19]

Elisha's refusal to be prophet in Elijah's place, choosing instead to follow him, forces Elijah to remain in his prophetic role. Elijah has more work to do: denouncing Ahab before offering mercy in 1 Kgs 21; and announcing the death of Ahaziah in 2 Kgs 1.[20] In support of this interpretation, we notice that Elijah has performed the command by God to anoint Hazael, Jehu and Elisha in reverse order, thus attempting to abrogate his responsibility prematurely. Furthermore, the repetition of לך שוב ("go, return") in v. 15 and v. 20 creates an echo between them. Just as God told Elijah to return and perform this anointing, now Elijah tells Elisha to return and perform the tasks in his place. Elisha's insistence upon following him delays Elijah's premature resignation from the prophetic role, even if Elijah will eventually ascend to heaven before he has anointed Jehu and Hazael.

c. *Read with 1 Kings 20 and 21*

Although Elisha is introduced in 19:19–21, there is a problem in the book of Kings that Elijah does not fulfil the command to anoint the other two men. Furthermore, neither he nor Elisha actually "anoints" any of the three, only appointing them or instigating their rise.[21] In the final form

19. Note that Olley, "Yhwh and His Zealous Prophet," 41, also takes this previous episode into account but comes to the opposite conclusion. He believes that "Elijah's heart is not in the task," and that is the reason for his strange behaviour. This does not explain why Elisha does not become prophet when Elijah gives him his mantle.

20. Also suggested in Kissling, *Reliable Characters*, 154.

21. Earlier commentators have suggested that originally there were traditions where Elijah performed these tasks, but they were suppressed in favour of the Elisha traditions (e.g. Julius Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des alten Testaments* [Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1899], 281; Hermann Gunkel, *Elias, Jahve und Baal* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1906], 25–26; Gressman, *Die älteste Geschichtsschreibung*, 268–69). It is more likely that 1 Kgs 19:1–18 is a later composition based upon the Jehu story and written when the Jehu story was edited to make it a fulfilment of prophecy. In particular, it mentions Elisha explicitly and there are verbal links to 19:19–21 (and we argue that Elijah's encounters with Elisha all originally belonged to the Elisha cycle). Thus 1 Kgs 19:1–18 was probably aware of the Elisha stories (Maeijer, *Elisha as a Second Elijah*, 11). The reason for Elijah, rather than Elisha, to be commanded to anoint Jehu and Hazael probably

of the MT, some explanation for Elijah omitting to appoint Hazael and Jehu is provided by the sequence of episodes following ch. 19, including the juxtaposition with ch. 20.[22] By positioning ch. 19 before ch. 20, the editor offered an explanation why Elijah did not anoint Hazael: Ahab failed to kill Ben-Hadad, and so there could not be a successor in Aram. In other words, Ahab prevented the succession of Hazael, and so Elijah was not to blame. Furthermore, there is a report in 20:15 that there were 7,000 sons of Israel and that this was *all* the people (כל־העם כל־בני ישראל שבעת אלפים, "all the people, all the sons of Israel, was 7,000"). The phrasing כל־העם ("all the people"), unusual for the numbering of the army, suggests a fulfilment of 19:18 that Elijah should leave only 7,000 in Israel. Then, in ch. 21, God has mercy upon Ahab, suggesting that the judgment against Ahab in ch. 20 has also been cancelled. It is thus inappropriate for Elijah to anoint Jehu as usurper, and it completes the explanation for why Elijah did not appoint Jehu and Hazael. By juxtaposing 19:19–21 with chs. 20–21, there is a question and answer relationship explaining why Elisha will not commit the violence initially foretold in 19:1–18.

When ch. 19 is juxtaposed with ch. 21 in the LXX, this effect is lessened somewhat.[23] The judgment against Ahab in ch. 20 comes after

worked in two directions. First, it legitimised Jehu because the ordination of his kingship was associated with the great prophet Elijah (see, e.g., Montgomery, *Book of Kings*, 315). Secondly, Hazael and Jehu finally bring punishment on the house of Ahab and the Baal worshippers as a denouement to the Elijah narrative, and so the association with Elijah completes the concerns of Elijah's prophetic ministry. The use of the word "anoint," which is not fulfilled by either Elijah or Elisha, may have been the result of incorporating an older source into 1 Kgs 19 and the word is now reinterpreted metaphorically.

22. Cf. Maeijer, *Elisha as a Second Elijah*, 12, who suggests that his omission is explained by the command that he appoint Elisha "in his place," thus delegating the first two missions. However, it must still be explained why Elijah performed these three commands in the wrong order.

23. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 368–72, believes chs. 20 and 22 were once one unified narrative and thus the LXX arrangement is original. Montgomery, *Book of Kings*, 319, believes the MT to be original, but many commentators are ambivalent (e.g. Cogan, *1 Kings*, 471; Long, *1 Kings*, 209). David W. Gooding, "Ahab According to the Septuagint," *ZAW* 76 (1964): 269–80, makes a detailed argument for the priority of the MT. This argument is more plausible than the alternative (although it is not essential to our analysis here). Added to his arguments, the MT בני ישראל ("the sons of Israel") seems more original because it is the term also used in 20:27 and 29. In these other occurrences, it is followed in the Greek. Thus 20:15 in the Greek is a variation in the pattern, suggesting it has been changed to suit the intention of the editor/scribe/translator.

the mercy towards him in ch. 21 in the LXX, and so there is no apologetic for why Jehu is not next on the throne. The juxtaposition of chs. 20 and 22 suggests that ch. 22 is the sequel to ch. 20 and that the death of Ahab is a result of the judgment against him in ch. 20. Furthermore, in most LXX manuscripts,[24] 1 Kgs 20:15 reads "60,000 men" instead of "seven thousand," and so again there is no apologetic. In all the LXX manuscripts בני ישראל ("the sons of Israel") in the MT is בני חיל (lit. "sons of the army"; presumed by the Greek υἱὸν δυνάμεως) so that only 7,000 soldiers, not 7,000 people in Israel are left. The LXX arrangement also has fewer contradictions in chs. 19–22. First, the placement of ch. 21 before ch. 20 means that there is no tension when Ahab dies in battle in ch. 22 despite God's mercy in ch. 21. The judgment and mercy in ch. 21 take place before the judgment in ch. 20, and the judgment in ch. 20 is fulfilled by Ahab's death in ch. 22. Secondly, in the MT it is unexplained how there are suddenly only 7,000 left in Israel despite Elijah not having done anything yet. The LXX does not contain this puzzling detail. However, the LXX version generates a different interpretation of ch. 19. Elijah inexplicably does not follow God's command, and the reader is left wondering at Elijah's disobedience.

In summary, the juxtaposition changes our interpretation of this episode. If ever it existed independently, it could have been interpreted either as Elijah appointing Elisha to be his successor and testing his loyalty, or as Elisha refusing to take his place and insisting on being his servant. This ambiguity is resolved when the story is juxtaposed with 2 Kgs 2:1–18 in the conjectured wonder story collection, and it becomes clear that Elisha has not yet taken Elijah's mantle nor succeeded to his position as prophet. When the episode was finally inserted into its current position, this interpretation was reinforced, and a reason was given for Elijah wanting to give up his role as prophet. The final editor has used the episode to establish Elisha as the one who would play a role in the anointing of Hazael and Jehu by placing it immediately after 1 Kgs 19:1–19. This role of appointing kings will not be revisited until the end of the Elisha cycle.

2. *2 Kings 2:1–18*

Two structural elements are central to the interpretation of this episode: parallels with Moses and Joshua; and parallels between Elijah and Elisha. First, there are many connections to the Moses and Joshua stories that create a parallel between their succession and the succession of Elisha to

24. LXX^B and LXX^L.

Elijah.[25] The locations of Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho, and the Jordan are all important in the Joshua stories.[26] In particular, the parting of the Jordan, first by Elijah, then Elisha, echoes when Joshua parted the Jordan and entered the land. Crossing the Jordan recalls Moses' crossing of the Red Sea and this creates a typology between Elijah and Moses, and then Elisha and Joshua who both cross the Jordan in the same direction. This is particularly significant because, in the book of Joshua, Joshua parts the Jordan as a confirmation of his succession to Moses. Now, in the same tradition, first Elijah then Elisha parts the river to announce succession.

Next, Elijah's ascent into heaven alludes in many ways to Moses' death. The location of Moses' death was also on the other side of the Jordan in Moab. Deuteronomy 34:1 uses the verb עלה ("went up") to describe Moses' ascent from Moab to Mount Nebo, and this is a *Leitwort* in 2 Kgs 2. In Deut 34:4 Moses is shown the land but told he will not cross over there, just as Elijah does not cross back to the other side of the Jordan. Deuteronomy 34:6 says nobody knew the place of Moses' burial, also drawing a link to Elijah who will have no grave.[27] Finally, Deut 34:9 reports that Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands upon him, and this is echoed by Elisha's request to be the heir to Elijah's spirit.

These parallels demonstrate the importance of Elijah and Elisha as prophets in Israel because they are compared to two great figures of the past. Miracles that interfere with nature in such a dramatic way are not recorded in the time between Moses/Joshua and Elijah/Elisha, greatly exalting these prophets. Additionally, the parallels demonstrate that Elisha is the legitimate successor to Elijah and that he will in some way complete the tasks or prophetic ministry begun by Elijah.

25. Many commentators have noticed some or all these parallels: see, e.g., Montgomery, *Book of Kings*, 354; Gray, *I & II Kings*, 425; Carroll, "Elijah–Elisha Sagas," 411–12; Burke O. Long, *2 Kings* (FOTL 10; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 31; Bergen, *Elisha*, 56; Cohn, *2 Kings*, 16; Joel S. Burnett, "'Going Down' to Bethel: Elijah and Elisha in the Theological Geography of the Deuteronomistic History," *JBL* 129 (2010): 287.

26. E.g. Josh 4:19–20; 5:9 (Gilgal); Josh 8:9, 12, 17 (Bethel); Josh 2; 6 (Jericho); Josh 1–4 (Jordan).

27. Note the tradition preserved in Josephus, *Ant.* 4.8.48, that Moses ascended into heaven like Elijah, drawing an even closer parallel. See Samuel E. Loewenstamm, "The Death of Moses," in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham* (ed. G. W. E. Nickelsburg Jr.; SCS 6; Missoula: Scholars Press/SBL, 1976), 185–218, for a survey of the traditions concerning the death of Moses. He quotes *b. Sotah* 13b, which mentions the tradition that Moses ascended but argues against it; and *Memar Marqah*, which says that Moses entered into a cloud, but later he went to a cave on the mountain and died there.

The second central structure to this episode is the parallel between Elijah and Elisha themselves.[28] This is achieved by the itinerary of Elisha in the second half of the story forming a mirror image to the journey they make together in vv. 1–11. Elijah and Elisha travel to Jericho, encounter the sons of the prophets, and then cross the Jordan. After Elijah's ascension, Elisha again crosses the Jordan and returns to Jericho, where he re-encounters the sons of the prophets. Elisha inherits Elijah's mantle, and, in v. 15 the sons of the prophets confirm that Elijah's spirit has settled upon him. Elisha uses the mantle to strike the waters of the Jordan and part them, echoing Elijah almost exactly. In a variation on Elijah's actions, he calls upon "the God of Elijah," making the parallel more overt. Even Elisha's pressing of Elijah that he will stay with him is echoed by the pressing of the sons of the prophets to send men to look for Elijah.

Suspense is generated before Elijah's ascension by the three-fold repetition of Elijah telling Elisha to stay behind (שֶׁב־נָא פֹה, "stay here please," vv. 2, 4, 6) and Elisha refusing (חַי־יְהוָה וְחֵי־נַפְשְׁךָ אִם־אֶעֶזְבֶךָּ, "as the Lord lives and as you yourself live, lest I leave you," vv. 2, 4, 6). In the first two instances, the sons of the prophets tell Elisha that Elijah will be leaving him, thus encouraging Elisha to turn back. In the third instance, when there is a variation and they now proceed together (v. 6, וילכו שניהם), the sons of the prophets return and watch from a distance. Not only does Elisha's persistence in following Elijah establish his unbreakable loyalty, but he is presented in contrast to the crowds of the sons of the prophets who come and speak to Elisha but then do not follow. Presumably the sons of the prophets from Bethel (v. 3) return to their city, as they are distinct from the sons of the prophets from Jericho. Then the group of prophets from Jericho keep their distance, whereas Elisha stays close to Elijah as they travel together across the Jordan. Furthermore, after three attempts, Elisha convinces Elijah that he will not leave him and Elijah acquiesces. This process builds up suspense regarding Elisha's succession and indisputably demonstrates Elisha's loyalty.

Although the ascension of Elijah undoubtedly exalts him as a special prophet, it also legitimises Elisha. After the suspense of Elijah's entreaties to leave him, a new tension is introduced when Elijah finally asks

28. Many commentators have observed these parallels, although they tend to include larger sections of narrative in the comparison of the two prophets; see, e.g., Long, *2 Kings*, 25–27; Cohn, *2 Kings*, 15–16; Burnett, "'Going Down' to Bethel," 288–90; T. Raymond Hobbs, "2 Kings 1 and 2: Their Unity and Purpose," *SR* 13 (1984): 331–32.

Elisha what he can do for him. Elijah does not understand Elisha's persistence when everyone knows that Elijah will soon ascend. Although the Moses/Joshua parallels provide a hint, Elisha finally states explicitly that he wants to be the heir to Elijah's spirit.

Introducing another tension, Elijah says this is a difficult thing and places the condition that Elisha must see Elijah being taken from him. Again, no explanation is given for Elijah's actions, but as the story progresses this condition ultimately legitimises Elisha. Verse 12 states explicitly that Elisha saw Elijah being taken (ואלישע ראה, "and Elisha saw"). He contrasts with the sons of the prophets who do not see Elijah being taken.[29] Although in v. 7 it says that they stood by (ויעמדו מנגד מרחוק, "and they stood opposite at a distance"), they do not see that he is taken to heaven and insist upon searching for him. Elisha, to confirm further that he has seen the ascension, tells them not to send men. When he eventually allows them, they do not find Elijah even after three days. This is final proof that Elisha saw accurately what occurred and that he has indeed fulfilled the condition to be heir to Elijah's spirit.

Elisha's response, tearing his robe, also demonstrates that he has seen what has happened. On one level it demonstrates grief, showing that he realises Elijah has been taken from him to heaven, presumably not to return. Furthermore, tearing his garment signifies the finality of Elijah being taken from him. Elisha now has Elijah's mantle, so he no longer needs his own garment.

Elisha's cry, "my father, my father, the chariots and horsemen of Israel," does not entirely fit the context here.[30] Interpreters have debated

29. Although note that it is ambiguous in v. 15 who is the object of the verbal form וירא֥הו ("and they saw him"). However, Elisha is the last mentioned character, and it is logical that they have just seen him part the Jordan before declaring that he has the spirit of Elijah.

30. It belongs more naturally in 2 Kgs 13:14, in the Aramean collection, where Elisha plays the role of defender for Israel and the function of its chariots and horsemen. Thus it could be a later addition taken from 2 Kgs 13:14. Here, although there is some associative link, it does not fit the context exactly because horses of fire (סוסי אש), not horsemen (פרשיו), appear as Elijah is taken up. Thus this verse was probably added into ch. 2 when the wonder stories and Aramaic collections were combined to forge links between them (alongside its literary function in the story). In favour of the priority of 13:14, see Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (trans. M. J. Dawn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 100, who says it is more appropriate there but it was probably a standard prophetic title; and Kurt Galling, "Der Ehrenname Elisas und die Entrückung Elias," *ZTK* 53 (1956): 129–48. Against the priority of 13:14, see Jack R. Lundbom, "Elijah's Chariot Ride," *JJS* 24 (1973): 48; Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings* (AB 11; Garden City: Doubleday, 1988), 32.

the meaning of this phrase, but in this isolated context it refers to the chariotry and horses that Elisha has just seen accompanying Elijah.[31] However, it is misleading to assume that it is confirmation Elisha has seen Elijah taken from him. First, the chariotry and horses of fire *separate* Elisha from Elijah while the storm actually takes Elijah to heaven. Thus the chariotry protects Elisha from the storm rather than being the means by which Elijah ascends. Incidentally, Elisha says the chariots and *horsemen* rather than *horses* of Israel, suggesting he does *not* see correctly. This interpretation is not supported elsewhere in the story and so probably cannot be considered a detail of significance. Rather, Elisha's exclamation demonstrates that he is "seeing," even if it causes some small tension within the text. Furthermore, it contributes to the theme of succession by showing a close relationship between Elisha and Elijah when he calls him "my father."

When this story is read in isolation, questions about Elijah's motivations are left unanswered: why does he encourage Elisha to stay in Bethel and Jericho, and why does he finally allow him to follow? Why does he consider Elisha's request a difficult thing, and does the condition come from the Lord, or is it his own? Elisha on the other hand is much more fully realised in the story. One question that *is* left open about Elisha concerns what role he is succeeding to. The Moses and Joshua parallels imply that he will complete some task initiated by Elijah, but there is no indication of what this task might be. Parting the Jordan River suggests he may be a miracle worker but this interpretation is not definite.

31. Martinus A. Beek, "The Meaning of the Expression 'the Chariots and the Horsemen of Israel' (II Kings ii 12)," in *The Witness of Tradition: Papers Read at the Join British–Dutch Old Testament Conference Held at Woudschoten* (ed. A. S. Woude; OtSt 17; Leiden: Brill, 1972), 1–10, traces the meaning of the phrase from a literal meaning of "the military might of Israel" to a symbolic meaning of "the strength of Israel," which could be appropriately applied to all prophets and thus was used to describe Elijah in this verse (see Gray, *I & II Kings*, 426, for a similar interpretation). However, we note that the literal meaning, the prophet is the means of military victory, *does* fit the context of 2 Kgs 13, and it is more probable that it found its way into 2 Kgs 2 by redactional means rather than because the phrase had since become metaphoric. Furthermore, Elijah is most emphatically *not* helpful for Israel in time of war as he is conspicuously absent in the preceding chapters when Ahab dies, and the other stories he appears in are without international conflict. Therefore, even if the phrase could be metaphorical to some degree, it was inappropriate for Elijah because it was actually ironic. It is only in the context of 2 Kgs 13 that the phrase takes on this additional meaning by the intertextuality. However, the primary reading in the context of 2 Kgs 2 must be the horses and chariots that take Elijah away and that are mentioned in the immediately preceding verse.

a. *Read with 1 Kings 19:19–21*

There is significant corroboration between 1 Kgs 19:19–21 and 2 Kgs 2:1–18, and this alerts the reader early in the reading process to the nature of Elisha's succession to Elijah. The relationship between Elijah and Elisha in 1 Kgs 19:19–21, and the verb וישרתהו in 19:21, echoing the term for Joshua as Moses' servant, reinforce the Moses/Joshua parallels in 2 Kgs 2 and raise our awareness more quickly when the significant place names Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho are introduced. Similarly, when the mantle appears in 2 Kgs 2:8, we surmise its significance after its key role in 1 Kgs 19:19–21. Meanwhile, it is puzzling that it is back in the hands of Elijah after he gave it to Elisha. This discontinuity may raise the expectation in the audience that the story will concern the succession of the prophets, an expectation fulfilled in the next verse when Elisha asks for Elijah's spirit.

Another important connection between these episodes is that they each demonstrate Elisha's persistence in following Elijah. When 2 Kgs 2:1–18 is read alone, the reason Elijah gives for Elisha to turn around is that the Lord has sent him successively to Bethel, Jericho, and then the Jordan (vv. 2, 4, 6). This implies that he has a special mission given to him by God in which Elisha cannot take part. The mission is revealed by the sons of the prophets, who tell Elisha that Elijah will be taken away from him. However, in conjunction with 1 Kgs 19:19–21, it is evident that Elijah was hesitant about Elisha following him from the beginning. It is now a continuation of the same theme: Elijah wants Elisha to depart and be prophet in his place. The urgency for Elisha to replace him becomes more intense as Elijah's departure draws closer.

The juxtaposition of these episodes gives added meaning to the phrase "my father, my father" because of the repetition from 1 Kgs 19:20 when Elisha says he will go and kiss his father. Elijah is his new father, and the one from whom he expects the prophetic inheritance, because he has formally departed from his natural father (note the legal language of inheritance in his request, פי־שנים). He demonstrates the appropriate grief at losing a father (he tears his clothing) and then takes up the prophetic inheritance.

b. *Read with 2 Kings 1*

As 1 Kgs 19:19–21 has been detached from the other Elisha stories, the effect of foreshadowing by the mantle, Elisha as Elijah's servant, and the significance of Elisha's father are all lessened. The current juxtaposition with 2 Kgs 1 increases the emphasis in 2 Kgs 2 on the figure of Elijah because he features dramatically in this episode. However, the importance of Elisha's succession is not lost because Elisha inherits the

prestige of Elijah and continues the tasks he has begun. The juxtaposition with 2 Kgs 1 also changes our perception of what these tasks will be, particularly when read within the final form of the book of Kings, in the sequence of episodes from 1 Kgs 17 onwards.

Second Kings 2 begins with the words, ויהי בהעלות יהוה את־אליהו בסערה השמים וילך אליהו ואלישע מן־הגלגל ("and it happened, when the Lord took up Elijah in a storm to heaven, Elijah and Elisha went from Gilgal"). Although chronologically it must have occurred after 2 Kgs 1, it marks a shift in characters from the end of the previous episode. The time marker is one of disjointedness, alluding to a point somewhere in the future, and it is not in stated continuity with the previous episode. Furthermore, as the previous episode does not take place in Gilgal, there is discontinuity in location. The relationship between these two episodes is not one of causality or consequences but rather of parallels and contrast between the stories. We will see that a number of thematic and verbal parallels confirm this interpretation of the juxtaposition. Furthermore, the episodes probably originally belonged to different cycles, one of Elijah and the other of Elisha. Now they have been placed next to one another, creating a dialogue between episodes from diverse origins.

The most prominent verbal parallel between the stories is the repetition of the root ירד ("to go down") and its antonym עלה ("to go up").[32] In 1 Kgs 1, עלה is used many times to describe Ahaziah going up to his bed, and his commanders and men going up to Elijah. Always there is a response using the verb ירד. As each subsequent contingent goes up to Elisha, fire comes down upon them. Similarly, after Ahaziah has gone up to his bed, he will not go down. This is also emphasised in v. 15 when Elijah goes down to visit the king. Elijah can go down but the king will not. Furthermore this story presents a conflict with a king of Israel who consults another god, drawing together the themes of Elijah's earlier conflict with the prophets of Baal, Jezebel, and King Ahab. This is heightened by Ahaziah being Ahab's son, as the Deuteronomic notes of 1 Kgs 22:52–54 and 2 Kgs 1:1 remind us. Both the conflict with Baal worship and the conflict with Ahab's dynasty continue.

The uses of the verbs עלה and ירד are not identical in 2 Kgs 1 and 2 Kgs 2:1–18, but their presence as *Leitwörter* in each episode forges a connection between them. There is one instance of the verb ירד to Bethel in 2:2, which is unusual considering Bethel was higher up than

32. Analysed at length in Burnett, "'Going Down' to Bethel," 281–97. However, I disagree with his conclusion that to "go down to Bethel" is an anti-Bethel polemic as there is no consistent correspondence in either passage that "to go up" is associated with good or "to go down" is bad.

Gilgal.[33] The verb is not used for their descent to Jericho despite it being geographically "down" from everywhere, and similarly the Jordan. Central to the story is that Elijah gloriously "goes up" to heaven, and the verb is repeated in both 2:1 and 2:11. Although there is no political or even religious conflict in 2 Kgs 2, Elijah's power to ascend into heaven has the broader significance that he also has power over kings and their apostasy, the power to control whether they "go up" or "down."

His power is also emphasised by the *Leitwörter* אש ("fire") in 2 Kgs 1 and מים ("water") in 2 Kgs 2 being a word pair.[34] First, אש appears in 1:10, 12, and 14 as Elijah brings fire down upon Ahaziah's men. In the next episode, מים is used in 2:8 and 14 when first Elijah, then Elisha, separates the waters of the Jordan. Then מים occurs in 2:19, 21, and 22 as Elisha purifies the water at Jericho. It was demonstrated earlier that this phenomenon gives emphasis to each of the key words,[35] and so here it draws attention to his ability to do miracles, first using fire and then water.

The parallel of "fifty men" also contributes to this corroboration between the episodes. In the first episode, groups of fifty men are sent to find Elijah, and they are thwarted by fire coming down from heaven. In the second episode, fifty men are sent to find Elijah and they fail. The fifty men in 2 Kgs 2:16 are even called בני־חיל, usually translated here as "strong men" but also meaning "soldiers," to increase the link between the two stories. This corroboration emphasises that Elijah is untouchable and all-powerful. Not even a group of fifty men have power to approach him without his mercy, and so he is further exalted.

Our understanding of the succession of Elisha to Elijah is also affected by this juxtaposition. Another parallel between the stories is that two groups of fifty men approach Elijah before a third group is successful, just as Elisha insists on following Elijah twice before a third time he gains Elijah's permission. This answers some questions: why does Elijah want Elisha to leave him? And why, when he finally asks Elisha what he wants, does he lay a condition upon it? Elijah is a solitary prophet who sits at the top of a hill and who will not respond to the request of the king in 2 Kgs 1. Furthermore, Elisha has not appeared as his servant in any of

33. See ibid.

34. For examples of these words as a word pair, see Isa 30:14; 43:2; Joel 1:20; Mic 1:4; Ps 66:12, and Prov 30:16. Also notice the overlap that fire appears in connection to the fiery chariot that takes Elijah to heaven. This type of overlap is observed also in the examples in Frisch, "s*hm*ʿ and *rʾh* as a Pair of Leitwörter," 95–96.

35. See pp. 37–38, above.

the stories since 1 Kgs 19, and so his presence at Elijah's side is not a given. We suspect that Elijah tells Elisha to stay behind in 2 Kgs 2 because he wants to be left alone. He finally relents, just as he relents in 2 Kgs 1. Elijah's reply, that bequeathing his spirit is a difficult thing to do, is in keeping with his propensity for bad news. This interpretation coheres with the interpretation of 2 Kgs 2 when juxtaposed with 1 Kgs 19:19–21, that Elisha's persistence is all about gaining his prophetic inheritance. Although 2 Kgs 2 is now separated from 1 Kgs 19, the effect of this earlier episode lingers and is reinforced by the new juxtaposition with 2 Kgs 1.

In 2 Kgs 1:17–18, the succession notice of Jehoram and Ahaziah is immediately juxtaposed with 2 Kgs 2. The succession of kings foreshadows the succession of prophets. The installation of another son of Ahab suggests that Elisha is inheriting from Elijah the task of judgment upon Ahab's dynasty, especially as the prophecies against Ahab's house in 1 Kgs 20 and 21 have not yet been fulfilled. Furthermore, Ahaziah's consultation of the Baals in 2 Kgs 1 suggests that this will be a key feature in Elisha's ministry following Elijah. Especially taking into account the sequence of episodes from 1 Kgs 19, this interpretation is strongly imposed upon 2 Kgs 2. We recall from 1 Kgs 19 that Elisha will be the one to eliminate the Baal worshippers from Israel. Thus there is an expectation that Elisha will have a violent task of removing apostasy and protesting against the wickedness of the king.

c. *Read with 2 Kings 2:19–22*

These expectations for violence and conflict are overturned by the juxtaposition with 2 Kgs 2:19–22, where Elisha peacefully heals the water supply of Jericho. Rather than bringing death to Baal worshippers in Israel, Elisha is bringing life to this town in its water source, לא־יהיה משם עוד מות ומשכלת ("there will be no more death and bereavement from there"). It is a powerful miracle, and it corroborates his succession to Elijah as the powerful prophet who divides the Jordan and ascends into heaven. However, his power is on a smaller scale, involved with the common people of Israel, not with international or political affairs. Although Elisha's image of the peaceful prophet bringing life will be overturned in 2 Kgs 2:23–25, the immediate juxtaposition of this positive story challenges our expectation of Elisha in his new role. Just as God previously delayed the judgment upon Ahab, he will now delay the judgment on the worshippers of Baal. Elisha is commissioned to leave only 7,000 in Israel, but in the intervening time he will bring prosperity to the people.

In conjunction with 2 Kgs 2:23–25, this sequence of stories creates an incomplete chiasm of geographical locations, where Elisha performs the mirror image journey of Elijah. Although Elisha will not return to Gilgal until 4:38–41,[36] he visits the other locations in Elijah's journey: Bethel (2:3–4, 23–24), Jericho (2:5–6, 19–22), and the Jordan (2:7–8, 12b–18).[37] This aspect of the stories reinforces the succession themes of 2 Kgs 2:19–21. It completes the theme that Elisha is the new Elijah, not only separating the Jordan with Elijah's mantle and spirit, but also retracing their steps and demonstrating his power. Furthermore, healing the waters immediately after crossing the Jordan is reminiscent of Moses cleansing the waters of Marah in Exod 15:22–27. In this pericope in Exodus the root רפא ("to heal") is also used (cf. 2 Kgs 2:21), this time to describe God as healer of diseases. This reinforces the Moses/Joshua parallels, highlighting Elisha's greatness because he is also like Moses.

Another small correspondence between these juxtaposed stories is in 2:19, הנה־נא מושב העיר טוב כאשר אדני ראה ("behold, the situation of the city is good as my lord sees"), when Elisha is asked to see the condition of the city so that he will perform the miracle. This parallels the succession of Elisha to Elijah where Elijah says if he *sees* his ascension, then he will receive his spirit. It now explains why Elijah places this condition upon Elisha, because "seeing" is closely connected with prophetic miraculous ability.[38] First, his ability to "see" the ascension of Elijah

36. This suggests the stories in 2 Kgs 3:1–4:37 are a later addition into this collection of Elisha stories. We will return to this later.

37. Yair Zakovitch, "'Go up, Baldhead! Go up, Baldhead': Rings of Commentary in a Biblical Story" (Hebrew), *Jerusalem Researches in Hebrew Literature* 7 (1985): 15. In contrast, some scholars prefer to see the chiasm as completed with a return to Samaria in 2:25 instead of Gilgal (e.g. Cohn, *2 Kings*, 11), or see Gilgal as an omission and include the unnamed mountain and Mount Carmel (1:9; 2:25), as well as Samaria (1:2; 2:25), in the pattern instead (e.g. Lundbom, "Elijah's Chariot Ride," 41; Kissling, *Reliable Characters*, 156). It is true that we must account for 2:25, but it is likely that this is a later addition designed to link the story of the Shunammite woman, which also has Elisha based in Samaria and Mount Carmel. This explanation is more satisfactory than supposing the chiasm would begin in Gilgal but end in Samaria, despite Gilgal remaining a central location for Elisha in the later stories. Stipp, *Elischa*, 443, observes a different pattern beginning at the end of ch. 2: Gilgal (ch. 2; 4:38), Carmel (2:25a; 4:1–37) battlefield (ch. 3). However, 4:1–37 also includes Shunem, and ch. 3 has a number of locations mentioned, thus creating too many exceptions for the chiasm to be convincing.

38. See Yael Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible* (LHBOTS 545; London: T&T Clark International, 2012), 266–69. She cites not only 2 Kgs 2:9–11 but also 2 Kgs 6:14–17 and Num 22:21–31.

legitimises him as successor, and, secondly, his sight is called upon by the people of Jericho before performing the miracle of cleansing their water supply.

3. *2 Kings 2:19–22*

Reading these short verses in isolation, no geographical location is named, but there is some limited information about the geography of the area. The men ask Elisha to look at the location and observe that it is good (מושב העיר טוב כאשר אדני ראה). There must have been something visible to the observer indicating that the location was pleasant or practical for a settlement. The particular water source (מוצא המים) to which they take Elisha is described with the definite article and so evidently had a unique, central role in the settlement. It must have been essential for farming because its contamination causes the land to bring death to the people (הארץ משכלת). Although Jericho is not named in vv. 19–22, it fits the description well. It is an oasis in the desert, and so its suitability for habitation would have been immediately apparent. Ground water could be used from wells, but primarily the town was dependent on Ein el Sultan, a large spring providing enough water for irrigation and farming in the land.[39] Although Jericho is not the only place that fits this description, it is possible that if this story ever existed independently, it was always attached to the place name Jericho.

As an independent story in vv. 19–22, men of the anonymous city come directly to Elisha, presumably because they have some knowledge of his reputation. The problem they ask him to solve is a significant one, and so we assume this reputation must have been powerful and impressive. They call him אדני ("my Lord") and explain to him their desperation, demonstrating both their respect for him and their confidence that he can solve their problem.

The problem of the water supply is spoken of in direct relation to its effect on the local population and is to some degree personified. The land is משכלת ("causing bereavement") in v. 19, a root which is usually used for causing the death of children or for being deprived of children.[40] When Elisha restores the purity of the water supply in v. 21, he says that he has "healed" it (רפאתי), again a verb which can be used elsewhere

39. See John R. Bartlett, *Jericho* (London: Lutterworth, 1982), 16, 42. The perennial flow of the spring spreads out over flat ground, which slopes gently towards the Jordan, watering a large area and providing an oasis ideal for farming.

40. See *HALOT*.

of water (e.g. Ezek 47:8) or other inanimate objects (e.g. a house in Lev 14:48), but primarily is used of healing people. Furthermore, he says "there will be no more death and unfruitfulness from there" (לא־יהיה משם עוד מות ומשכלת), relating the healing of the water supply to the life it brings to the people of Jericho. Even the narrator adds to the description of how remarkable the miracle is by saying that the water was healed "to this day" (עד היום הזה), to show the lasting effectiveness of what Elisha had done. This human dimension, found in the personification of the water and its effects on the population, exalts Elisha and increases the importance of the miracle.

Commentators have read this short episode as either the paradigm for a prophetic miracle[41] or as an explanation for how Jericho again became habitable after Joshua's curse against it.[42] Certainly the story has the quality of a legend as Elisha asks for a new dish and salt, and performs what appears to be a magical act.[43] The newness of the dish is reminiscent of other instances where an object is used in a supernatural context. Other examples include the new ropes in the Samson story in Judg 16:11, a new cart for the ark in 1 Sam 6:7 and 2 Sam 6:3, and Ahijah's new prophetic cloak in 2 Kgs 11:29.[44] Salt also often had a ritual use.[45] However, although Elisha's *actions* are described, the climax and final clause of the story is that everything happened as a result of his *word*, "according to the word of Elisha which he spoke" (כדבר אלישע אשר דבר). Particular attention is drawn to this phrase because it deviates from the more usual formula כדבר יהוה ("according to the word of the Lord") found in the Elijah stories and biblical narrative as a whole.[46] The confirmation of Elisha's word is the miracle and centrepiece of this short story, not the magical act of throwing salt onto the water source, or even God's role in the miracle.

This emphasis at the end of v. 22 is made more interesting when we return to what Elisha actually says in v. 21. For he begins his speech with כה־אמר יהוה ("thus says the Lord"). It is ambiguous whether the following clauses are direct or indirect speech, but the most natural reading is

41. E.g. Bergen, *Elisha*, 67. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 16, 24, and Long, *2 Kings*, 34, also see it as part of a general pattern of miraculous stories or power demonstration narratives, but they both note the central role of the prophetic word.

42. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 426–27, says it began as a ritual to release Jericho from the curse but was transformed by tradition into a miracle of the prophet.

43. Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 17; Hentschel, *2 Könige*, 11.

44. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 428.

45. Ibid. Note, e.g., Lev 2:13; Num 18:19; Ezek 43:24.

46. Bergen, *Elisha*, 67. From the Elijah/Elisha stories he lists 1 Kgs 17:5, 16; 2 Kgs 1:17; 4:44; 7:17; 9:26; 10:17.

that it is direct speech from the Lord, and therefore God not Elisha says "I have healed the water." It is also natural to assume that the statement "there will be no more death and bereavement there" is a continuation of God's speech because there are no indicators otherwise. Although Elisha throws the salt on the water source, God is the one who has healed it. Elisha reports to the people what God has done, alongside a promise that the healing will extend into the future. Verse 22 is not a confirmation and legitimation of Elisha's power to heal the spring, or even God's power to heal the spring, but rather a confirmation of the *accuracy of his prophetic word*. The story demonstrates the reliability of Elisha's report of God's speech, that he has healed the waters, and there will be no more death and bereavement from there.

a. *Read with 2 Kings 2:1–18*

Continuity with vv. 1–18 provides a location for the episode in vv. 19–22: Jericho. There is no indication that Elisha has left Jericho, and the definite article "the city" in אנשי העיר ("the men of the city") requires the reader to supply the last mentioned place name. As described already, 2:19–22 and 2:23–24 become a part of the structure of Elisha's succession to Elijah. Elisha reverses Elijah's journey through Jericho and Bethel and is now heir of Elijah's spirit. Just as the sons of the prophets came out from Jericho to meet Elijah and Elisha in 2:5, now the men of the town also approach Elisha when he stays in the town in v. 18.

Reading vv. 19–22 with vv. 1–18, the source of Elisha's reputation, which caused the men of Jericho to approach him, is revealed. In v. 15 the sons of the prophets in Jericho proclaim that the spirit of Elijah is on Elisha. Furthermore, they have seen him part the waters of the Jordan, so they know first hand Elisha's power over water.

The Moses and Joshua parallels in vv. 1–18, and the positioning of our episode immediately after Elisha crosses the Jordan, add a new dimension of parallels to vv. 19–22. The story echoes Exod 15:22–25 where Moses makes the bitter waters of Marah sweet immediately after crossing the Red Sea. A connection to this passage in Exodus allows an added interpretation for the root רפא ("to heal") in 2 Kgs 2:19–22. In Exod 15:26, after purifying the water at Marah, Moses says that if the Israelites obey his commandments, God will spare them from the diseases of the Egyptians, using the phrase אני יהוה רפאך ("I, the Lord, will heal you"). The use of the root רפא in 2 Kings 2:19–22 creates a parallel that God heals the people through Elisha, just as he promised to heal them through Moses.

The location in Jericho, in conjunction with the Joshua allusions in vv. 1–18, creates a layer of interpretation in this passage responding to the curse against Jericho in Josh 6:26. The emphasis of this episode when read independently suggested neither that it was an etiological tale for the town of Jericho nor that it was a reversal of the curse in Josh 6:26. Nevertheless, it does offer a confirmation of the word of Joshua in Josh 6:26 akin to the phrase עד היום הזה ("until this day"). Joshua says of those who rebuild Jericho that בבכרו יסדנה ובצעירו יציב דלתיה ("with his oldest son he will found it and with his youngest he will set up its gates"), now echoed in the elders' use of the word משכלת to describe the impact of the water supply.[47] Joshua's word has been fulfilled up to that present day, but now Elisha takes his place as the one who announces the future of the city. Up to this point there has been death and bereavement, but it will be no more.

Another important aspect of 2 Kgs 2:1–18 is that Elisha is paralleled with Elijah, and this draws our attention to a parallel in vv. 19–22 with the story of Elijah in 1 Kgs 17. In 1 Kgs 17 a widow's son becomes sick and Elijah revives him. Already there is a subtle parallel with our episode in the loss of a child in 1 Kgs 17 and מות ומשכלת in 2 Kgs 2:21. Both situations are reversed by a prophet, even if the same verb root for healing is not used in the passages. Furthermore, 1 Kgs 17:24 concludes with the words of the widow, ודבר־יהוה בפיך אמת ("the word of the Lord in your mouth is true"), confirming the prophetic authority of Elijah and the reliability of his communication from God. Now Elisha, who also reports the message that God has healed the spring of Jericho, has his words confirmed as true. The confirmation is a central concern of these short verses, and it adds the dimension that Elisha has inherited the spirit of Elijah and is now an effective prophet.

b. *Read with 2 Kings 2:23–25*

The episode in 2:23–25 extends Elisha's journey to Bethel, mirroring Elijah, and so it is drawn into the structure of succession between the two prophets. There is continuity between the two episodes because Elisha remains the central character, and v. 23 announces specifically that he travelled "from there" (ויעל משם), meaning Jericho. These events take place chronologically after the Jericho episode and can be related causally to it.

In vv. 23–24 youths come "from the city" (מן־העיר) as Elisha is going up the road to Bethel. Many commentators have assumed the youths

47. Note the ongoing tradition of the curse is also attested in 1 Kgs 16:34.

come from Bethel,[48] however v. 24 makes it clear that Elisha has to turn around to look behind him in order to see the boys who are mocking him (ויפן אחריו ויראם, "and he turned behind him and he saw them"). This phrasing strongly suggests that they have come from behind him, from Jericho. Furthermore, מן־העיר parallels משם earlier in the verse, suggesting they refer to the same place.[49] This circumstance has a significant impact on our interpretation of Elisha in vv. 19–22. Read alone, Elisha is powerful, helpful, and brings life and restoration to the community of Jericho. Now, in the next episode, he brings death to 42 youths from that same city.

Although these themes of life and death appear to contradict each other, essentially these two episodes corroborate the same ideology. Elisha speaks: first transmitting the word of the Lord (v. 22, כה־אמר יהוה), and then cursing in the name of the Lord (v. 24, בשם יהוה). In both cases, Elisha's word is effective and is confirmed by the narrator.

Nevertheless, there is significant irony in the juxtaposition of these two stories, that death and bereavement come so quickly to Jericho and, moreover, at the hand of Elisha. Elisha's words that no more death or bereavement would come "from there," meaning from the water, can now be interpreted as ironic because death will no longer come from the spring but from the prophet himself. The connotation of the bereavement of children in the word משכלת in vv. 19–22 resounds for the reader in vv. 23–25,[50] as this is precisely what has happened for the parents of the 42 youths. The irony is deepened by our reading of vv. 19–22 as a reversal of Josh 6:26. With this interpretation, the healing extends beyond the water supply to the whole city, even if this is not specifically stated in the text. There has been another reversal, and Jericho is once again cursed when Elisha curses the youths.

Overall, although Elisha's accuracy and reliability as a prophet is sustained in our interpretation, his representation as a miraculous healer and bringer of life is tempered by his anger and vengeance in the next episode. He has not only come to bring life for the people of Israel but also death, as foretold in 1 Kgs 19. These two episodes embody opposite qualities in Elisha. He performs a miracle that removes death and bereavement, but he can just as easily call on the Lord to bring about death and bereavement himself.

48. E.g. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 429; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 38; Cohn, *2 Kings*, 17; Burnett, "'Going Down' to Bethel," 281–97.

49. Zakovitch, "Rings of Commentary," 16.

50. Ibid., 17, points out that bears are frequently associated with the root שכל.

4. *2 Kings 2:23–25*

The short episode in vv. 23–25 is shocking to modern ears, albeit with a touch of black humour. Forty-two children are mauled by two bears after they mock the prophet Elisha for his baldness. Commentators have argued that only in a modern reading we consider this story cruel and inhumane,[51] but a close reading of the story in isolation suggests that, to some extent, the ancient readers were also supposed to be shocked by it.

The youths are referred to twice in the two verses, the first time as נערים קטנים and the second time as ילדים. Although the term נער is sometimes used to refer to adults,[52] the qualification קטנים ('small") clarifies that they are children. Furthermore, ילדים is less ambiguous in its denotation of children. By picturing the group as young, our sympathy is heightened and they seem less responsible for their actions. The verb used to describe the bears mauling the children, תבקענה ("they tore up"), conjures up a very violent image compared to a simple report that the children had died. Furthermore, the exact figure given, 42, is high, depicting a mass slaughter of youngsters. By including these details, the story must have been shocking to an ancient audience, even one convinced of the authority of the prophet.

However, the story is not without sympathy for Elisha's point of view. Many children died, but it is evident from the phrasing of v. 24, מהם ארבעים ושני ילדים ("from them, 42 children"), that there were even more children mocking him whom the bears did not take. Elisha was vastly outnumbered, and we imagine quite an extraordinary chorus of children.

Read in isolation, it is difficult to understand their insult, עלה קרח עלה קרח ("go up baldhead, go up baldhead"). Presumably Elisha was puffing or tired as he ascended the hill to Bethel, and so the children seized upon two weaknesses of the man that they could see from behind him: that he was struggling to "go up" and that he was bald.[53] An unpleasant thing to say to someone but not one deserving death! However, Elisha does not actually bring death upon them or even ask for it—rather, he curses them in the name of the Lord (ויקללם בשם יהוה). He responds to mocking with cursing and leaves it to God to decide how he acts on

51. See Kissling, *Reliable Characters*, 165, and Bergen, *Elisha*, 69, following R. D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (IBC; Atlanta: John Knox, 1987), 161.

52. Burnett, "'Going Down' to Bethel," 295–96. He also gives examples where ילד can refer to an adult. However, in all these examples, there are other explanatory details that make it apparent they are adults, whereas the connotation of these phrases here suggests young children.

53. Zakovitch, "Rings of Commentary," 10–11.

the curse. In this way, responsibility for the death of so many children is shifted from Elisha to God. Finally, there are elements of the punishment by bears that correspond literarily with the offence of the children. The children come מן־העיר ("from the city"), and then the bears come מן־היער ("from the forest"), in a small wordplay created by the rearrangement of only two letters. Just as no reason is given for the children leaving the city, no reason is given for the bears leaving the forest. The children call out their taunt twice, and then there are two bears.[54] Although it stops short of measure for measure, the literary parallels suggest some poetic justice.

The short episode ends in v. 25 with Elisha continuing his journey to Mount Carmel and then Samaria. It has been suggested that this is a redactional link included after the stories in 3:3–27 and 4:1–37 were added;[55] and if this was so, it is particularly important for understanding the link with the surrounding passages. Samaria is later mentioned in 3:6 and Mount Carmel in 4:25. The journey interrupts the concentric pattern of place names by delaying Elisha's return to Gilgal until 4:38. The break suggests that v. 25 along with the following episodes in 2 Kgs 3 and 4:1–37 were inserted between these stories.

Nevertheless, a reading of v. 25 with vv. 23–24 in isolation is interesting for our interpretation of this short episode. Elisha departs "from there" to Mount Carmel, implying he left the road to Bethel and went straight to Mount Carmel, avoiding Bethel. He left immediately after the incident (understandable if you left such destruction in your wake), going as far away as possible and not stopping to offer any consolation to the bereaved families. This adds to the senselessness of the whole incident, that Elisha changed the course of his journey anyway and did not continue his journey to Bethel.

a. *Read with 2 Kings 2:19–22*

In our analysis of 2:19–22, we observed the close connection between these two stories: the children in vv. 23–24 come out of Jericho where Elisha has just healed the water; he has promised that there will be no more bereavement from the water, but yet, in this next episode, his curse leads to the bereavement of 42 children. In particular, the appearance of bears recalls the description of the land as משכלת ("bereaving of children") because the expression דב שכול ("bear bereaved of children") appears a number of times in the Hebrew Bible (2 Sam 17:8; Hos 13:8;

54. Ibid., 11–12.

55. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 430; Hentschel, *2 Könige*, 11.

Prov 17:12).[56] Elisha has removed the bereavement of children from the town of Jericho, but now he is responsible for the mass slaughter of their children, and this irony challenges the reader's interpretation of Elisha. It increases the pathos in the tragedy and therefore questions how Elisha could do such a thing. He said there would be no more bereavement from the spring in Jericho, bringing hope to the town, but now, because of a personal insult, he brings bereavement 42 times over.

However, there are also aspects of this striking juxtaposition that encourage the reader to evaluate Elisha more generously in vv. 23–25. The children are no longer mocking a stranger on the road, but they are mocking a man they know is a powerful prophet from God and who has recently saved their township from a bad water supply. This is a shameful way to treat a departing guest and, even more so, one who accurately speaks the words of the Lord. Indeed, it is no longer just an insult to Elisha, it is an insult to the Lord, and the bears appear only after a curse in his name.

By reading vv. 23–25 with the whole of ch. 2, the insult from the children to Elisha can be reinterpreted. The concentric pattern in the chapter draws our attention to the contrasting way in which Elijah is greeted by the people of Jericho on the road from Bethel. In 2:5, as Elijah and Elisha approached Jericho, the sons of the prophets come out to show respect to them. In 2:15, they show this respect again to Elisha when they announce that he has the spirit of Elijah and they bow down before him. This pattern of respect to the prophets is now broken. A comparison with Elijah is heightened by the particular nature of the insult, עלה קרח ("go up you baldhead"). Not only does it continue the word motif on עלה begun in 2 Kgs 1, it draws particular comparison to the central feature of the story in ch. 2: Elijah "goes up" to heaven. There is a cruel contrast between Elijah, who went gloriously up to heaven in a whirlwind, and Elisha, who is apparently struggling to climb the hill to Bethel. The unfavourable comparison for Elisha is made more acute in conjunction with 2 Kgs 1:8, where Elijah is described as איש בעל שער ("a hairy man").[57] In this reading, the children of Jericho mock a man whom their town formerly bowed before, and they belittle him next to Elijah, even though the town formerly declared he had Elijah's spirit.

56. Zakovitch, "Rings of Commentary," 17.

57. Kissling, *Reliable Characters*, 166, extends the reference to 2 Kgs 1 by pointing out that Elijah is a hairy man sitting on a hill and is commanded to come down, compared to Elisha the bald man who is told to go up. In this way Elisha is compared unfavourably with his master.

This interpretation encourages the reader to perceive a great insult to the prophet Elisha. It is questioning his inheritance of Elijah's spirit and succession to his role. From this point of view, Elisha's reaction is more justified. It is not about personal vengeance but about establishing his prophetic credentials currently under question. The result proves he has inherited the power of Elijah, and the power of his word can no longer be doubted. The stories of the water at Jericho and the bears on the road to Bethel resonate with an emphasis on the fulfilment of the prophetic word, bringing both life and death.

b. *Read with 2 Kings 3:1–3*

The first episode in 2 Kgs 3:1–3 is a succession notice for the kings of Israel. Thematically it corroborates 2 Kgs 2 because the succession of kings echoes the succession of prophets. The shift in subject material indicates that the prophetic succession is now complete.

The link in v. 25 encourages the reader to interpret vv. 23–25 in light of the two stories connected to the place names in v. 25: 2 Kgs 3:4–27 and 4:8–37. Interestingly, both of these stories have elements where the word of Elisha fails. In 3:4–27 his prophecy is apparently fulfilled, until v. 27 when suddenly the Israelite army retreat without the promised victory. In 4:8–37 Elisha correctly announces that the Shunammite woman will have a child but then her son dies. Furthermore, when he sends Gehazi to raise the child, it is not effective. These complex stories depict Elisha as powerful but also limited. Although there is no limit on Elisha's power or on the reliability of his prophetic word in vv. 22–25 (and vv. 19–21), the link to other more nuanced stories tempers the claims of the shorter episodes. We will examine the effect of these stories in more detail shortly.

5. *2 Kings 3:1–3*

Second Kings 3:1–3 consists of a Deuteronomic formula,[58] reporting the accession of Jehoram and giving an evaluation of his kingship. Juxtaposition with 2 Kgs 2 and 2 Kgs 3:4–27 organises the chronology of the material and affects our interpretation of it.

58. E.g. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 430; DeVries, *Prophet against Prophet*, 117–23; Long, *2 Kings*, 36. On these formulae in general see Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 18–25. It was thus not originally part of either the Elijah or Elisha cycles and was inserted in its current position in the Elisha cycle by an editor, probably at the same time as the incorporation of 1 Kgs 19 and the Jehu story, in order to justify the judgment against Jehoram.

The position of 2 Kgs 3:1–3 interrupts the flow of stories concerning Elisha, as well as the denouement to Elijah's ascension to heaven. Along with 3:54–4:37, it breaks Elisha's journey retracing Elijah's steps. Structurally it marks a new beginning within the Elisha stories because it introduces the king with whom Elisha commences his ministry independent of Elijah.

Jehoram has already been introduced in 2 Kgs 1:17, but his reintroduction at this point is appropriate because his name will appear in the next episode in 3:4–27.[59] Jehoram is named only in 3:4–27, 8:25–29, and 9:1–29, which frame the section, and there are additional episodes in 6:8–23; 6:24–7:20, and 8:1–6 where the king of Israel is referred to but not named.[60] Conversely, Elisha appears consistently as the main character in every episode, apart from 8:1–6 where he is not present although his character is essential to the story. Although Elisha will be the central character in the following stories, the formula draws attention to his interactions with the king of Israel as a central concern, despite the king not always being named.

The reintroduction of Jehoram's succession to the throne is also appropriate because it follows the succession of Elisha to Elijah. The repetition of the formula has a similar function to a resumptive repetition, enclosing ch. 2 and the prophetic succession. A resumptive repetition usually indicates a synchronous or otherwise non-chronological episode. The non-chronological episode is then followed by a resumption of the previous plot, so the two ought to be interpreted non-chronologically. This is also illustrated in the episodes in 2 Kgs 1–3. The episode in ch. 1 concludes with a summary formula of Ahaziah and assumes a location in Samaria. The episodes in ch. 2 then begin with a focus upon Elijah and Elisha, and a new location near Gilgal (2:1, וילך אליהו ואלישע מן הגלגל, "and Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal"), indicating a break in the chronological sequence. The previous chronological sequence is then resumed in 3:1–3 by the resumptive repetition.[61]

59. As we will investigate shortly, his name was probably added later.

60. Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 58, 60, writes that this is typical of political *legenda*, and it attests that the origin of the story was not in court circles but among common people of the prophet's followers.

61. Note that these two chronological sequences are not two distinct sources woven together. The first thread in ch. 1, which resumes in ch. 3, is composed of both Deuteronomic formulae and stories from the Elijah and Elisha cycles. The other sequential thread in ch. 2 also contains material from the Elisha cycle. Thus the chronological sequences are the result of editorial intention rather than the accident of two sources being woven together.

Although these episodes are not necessarily sequential, the transition from Elisha to Elijah in 2:1–18 explains Elisha's presence, and the Deuteronomic formula explains the appearance of Jehoram, not Ahaziah, as king of Israel in 3:4–27. These explanations could have been placed in chronological sequence rather than the current presentation, which obscures whether the monarchic or prophetic succession took place first. The synchronous presentation prompts the reader to compare and contrast the successions. Cohn suggests that the delay of Jehoram's regnal summary from 1:17–18 by the story of Elijah and Elisha indicates the subordination of king to prophet.[62] Although Cohn's evaluation of monarch and prophet has merit on the basis of other evidence,[63] our analysis of the chronological structure suggests that the succession is not delayed but presented synchronously. The structure itself does not subordinate Jehoram; in fact, it reflects positively on Jehoram in an analogy between the successions.

In Elisha's succession to Elijah, Elisha mimics his master by parting the Jordan River and performing a miracle at Jericho. When the youths on the road to Bethel question his succession to Elijah, he gives a convincing demonstration of his power to do miracles. Thus Elisha emulates his impressive predecessor. In the parallel succession of Jehoram to Ahaziah, Jehoram does *not* emulate his *unworthy* predecessor. Jehoram removes the Baal worship, unlike Ahab, who in 2 Kgs 3:2 makes pillars of Baal, and unlike Ahaziah, who in 2 Kgs 1:2 sends messengers to the prophets of Baal. In this important aspect, he does not succeed to the legacy of his predecessors, although he follows the sin of Jeroboam. The parallel concept of succession with an inversion of the circumstances creates a dialogue that questions the relationship between prophet and monarch. As Elisha succeeds Elijah, we expect that the kings will also be images of one another and that the dramas unfolding between Elijah and the Omrides will continue with Elisha in Elijah's place. However, Jehoram does not walk in the ways of his parents and brother, and an opening is made for a different type of relationship. As the narrative continues, this is fulfilled when Elisha is on better terms with Jehoram and the unnamed king than Elijah was with Ahab or Ahaziah.

Although the second formula functions as a resumptive repetition, there are important variations between them, and these differences shape the interpretation of the episode in 3:4–27 following 3:1–3. Second Kings 1:17 reports that Jehoram succeeded Ahaziah in the second year of

62. Cohn, *2 Kings*, 19.

63. For example, the relative lengths of the stories, and Elisha's role as hero in 3:4–27 compared to the ineffectuality of Jehoram, suggest this message.

Jehoram of Judah, whereas 3:1 dates his reign to the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat. This can be resolved when reading the final form by proposing that Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat was crowned in Jehoshaphat's seventeenth year, and thus the second year of his reign coincided with the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat's reign. This creates further chronological problems because it contradicts other data in Kings if the reader attempts to reconstruct the actual chronology.[64] Nevertheless, this confusing and contradictory chronology has a purpose in light of the following episode. It is important that Jehoshaphat is the king in this episode because he is contrasted positively with Jehoram, and this is only possible with the incoherent chronology.[65] The juxtaposition of this formula next to 3:4–27 enables the presence of both these characters in the episode, even if it creates a tension with 1:17 and the other regnal notices in the book.

A second important difference from 1:17 is that 3:1–3 does not mention Ahaziah and only describes Jehoram as the son of Ahab, implying he was next in line if read without the context of the previous chapters. Furthermore, the evaluation of Jehoram is in terms of his father and mother—he pointedly did not follow in their footsteps although he followed in the sin of Jeroboam. The comparison with Jehoram's father and mother, and the irrelevance of his brother Ahaziah, will become apparent in the following episode.

64. See Gershon Galil, *The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah* (SHCANE 9; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 32, for an overview; and James D. Shenkel, *Chronology and Recensional Development in the Greek Text of Kings* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 72–82, for the problems involved in the LXX manuscripts.

65. Note that in the Lucianic manuscripts of the LXX, Ahaziah king of Judah is named in place of Jehoshaphat and there is no synchronism in 3:1–3. It is considered more likely that Jehoshaphat replaced Ahaziah to identify a righteous king for whom it was appropriate for Elisha to intervene. Thus it is proposed that the MT changed its chronology in 3:1–3 to allow Jehoshaphat to appear in 3:4–27 after this story was inserted (see, e.g., Miller, "Elisha Cycle," 451–53; Shenkel, *Chronology*, 93–101; and followed by McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings*, 97–98). In this case, the juxtaposition of these passages altered not just the interpretation of each passage but also the actual wording of the chronological notice. Other scholars argue for the priority of the MT chronology as Jehoshaphat's name could have been changed to Ahaziah in order to cohere with the formula in 1:17 (e.g. Edwin R. Thiele, "Coregencies and Overlapping Reigns among the Hebrew Kings," *JBL* 93 [1974]: 177–88; Galil, *Chronology*, 142–43). Note that even if Jehoshaphat's name was prior to Ahaziah, his name could still have been secondary in this text replacing an unnamed king of Judah, as we will discuss shortly.

Not only does the formula in 3:1–3 look back in parallel to the prophetic succession, it looks forward to the reign of Jehoram and evaluates these events. It offers the customary definitive evaluation of the king, in Jehoram's case doing evil in the eyes of the Lord (ויעשה הרע בעיני יהוה). This evaluation is qualified by two contrasting statements beginning with רק, the first saying that he was not as evil as his father and mother and that he did not worship Baal (רק לא כאביו וכאמו ויסר את מצבת הבעל אשר עשה אביו, "only he was not like his father and mother, but he turned from the image of the Baal which his father made"); and the second accusing him of clinging to the sins of Jeroboam, presumably the worship of idols (רק בחטאות ירבעם בן נבט אשר החטיא את ישראל דבק לא סר ממנה, "only he clung to the sins of Jeroboam son of Nabat which he made Israel sin, he did not turn from them"). Thus the black and white evaluation is softened and some credit is given to Jehoram for banishing the Baal worship.

Despite this softening, the formula for Jehoram is less generous than for other kings who banish Baal but continue inappropriate worship of idols. Two other kings with qualifying statements beginning with רק are evaluated as doing right before the Lord. Jehu removed Baal worship but still committed the sins of Jeroboam, and his formula in 2 Kgs 10:28–31 (רק חטאי ירבעם בן נבט אשר החטיא את ישראל לא סר יהוא מאחריהם, "only, as for the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat which he cause Israel to sin, Jehu did not turn from after them") uses similar words to Jehoram's formula, repeating the root חטא ("to sin") and the phrase לא סר ("he did not turn"). Jehu did not "do evil in the eyes of the Lord" but rather there is a pair of ambiguous statements: he did "what was right in my [the Lord's] eyes" (אשר הטיבת לעשות הישר בעיני), but he was not careful to walk in the law of God (ויהוא לא שמר ללכת בתורת יהוה). Although the summary of Jehu's actions is similar to Jehoram (he removed Baal but worshipped idols), he is described as doing right in God's eyes overall.[66]

Similarly, in 2 Kgs 15:1–4 Azariah is described as doing right in the eyes of the Lord (ויעש הישר בעיני יהוה), even though he has a qualifying phrase beginning with רק (רק הבמות לא סרו עוד העם מזבחים ומקטרים בבמות, "only the high places were not taken away; still the people sacrificed and made offerings at the high places"). Although he worshipped at high places, not necessarily using idols, he is still guilty of

66. See Lissa M. Wray Beal, *The Deuteronomist's Prophet: Narrative Control of Approval and Disapproval in the Story of Jehu (2 Kings 9 and 10)* (LHBOTS 478; New York: T&T Clark International, 2007), especially pp. 147–48, on the tension between positive and negative evaluations of Jehu both here and in the episodes of the narrative.

inappropriate worship. He may have been judged more favourably because, unlike Jehoram, he was a king of Judah rather than Israel. A similar explanation can be given for Jehoshaphat's favourable evaluation in 1 Kgs 22:43–44 where he is described as doing right in the eyes of the Lord (לעשות הישר בעיני יהוה) despite the high places remaining (the qualification being introduced by אך this time rather than רק but with similar meaning). The comparison between these four kings, who are given similar evaluations in similar formulae, demonstrates that Jehoram's overall evaluation is judged more harshly than the other kings.

By placing an authoritative evaluation such as this in juxtaposition with the following episode, the reader's interpretation of Jehoram's actions will be biased. This will be illustrated when we examine the following episode. Furthermore, the formula functions as *mise-en-abyme*[67] for the ensuing episodes, influencing the reader's interpretation with its encompassing evaluative summary of Jehoram's reign. Although it judges harshly, it retains some ambiguity as is appropriate for a summary occurring at the beginning of the king's reign rather than at the end. There is scope for the reader's evaluation of Jehoram to be shaped by the events related in the following episode, even if they are now viewed through the lens of the narrator's negative judgment. The authoritative evaluation changes the interpretation of the following episodes but is itself affected by dialogue. The black and white judgment on Jehoram is contradicted and corroborated; the ambiguity created by the qualifications on this judgment in the formula opens a question that is explored further in the narrative.

6. *2 Kings 3:4–27*

The episode in 2 Kgs 3:4–27 is self-contained and can be read coherently in isolation from its context with a beginning, middle, and ending to the story.[68] Most scholars suppose this episode was inserted into the other

67. See above, pp. 42–43.

68. Particularly if the names of the kings Jehoshaphat and Jehoram in the story are secondary, as many scholars believe, the episode could stand alone without any background explanatory material necessary. We have already observed the variant tradition in the Lucianic recension of the LXX that Ahaziah was the king of Judah in place of Jehoshaphat. Many scholars suggest that Jehoshaphat's name is secondary, even if it was prior to the insertion of Ahaziah (e.g. Shenkel, *Chronology*, 98–108; Miller, "Elisha Cycle," 447). It is likely that his name was inserted because of the positive opinion about him expressed by Elisha. Jehoram's name may also be secondary because he is frequently referred to as the king of Israel, and only once as Jehoram in v. 6 (e.g. Simon J. DeVries, "The Three Comparisons in 1 Kings XXII 4B and Its Parallel and 2 Kings III 7B," *VT* 39 [1989]: 305).

Elisha stories at a late stage, probably the last episode added before the Deuteronomic editing and the insertion of the Jehu story. Thus we will analyse it only in the final form and prior to the insertion of 3:1–3.[69]

a. *2 Kings 3:4–27 Read Independently*

This episode begins with a threat against the northern kingdom of Israel, which prompts co-operation between the kings of Israel and Judah, and later the king of Edom. The episode then shifts into material more familiar to prophetic contexts: there is no water, and the kings call on the prophet Elisha to perform a miracle for them. When the king of Israel declares that the Lord is leading the three kings into the hands of the Moabites, the dramatic tension is transformed from thirst in the desert to imminent defeat on the battlefield. The prophet Elisha addresses both problems simultaneously when the land fills with water, deceiving the Moabites, and opening the way for the Israelites to attack. Meanwhile, the Edomite and Judean armies are forgotten from the narrative. The Israelites experience success until the king of Moab sacrifices his son and the Israelite army withdraws.

The shifts between political and prophetic concerns in the story have led scholars to suggest that an originally political story was expanded to incorporate a prophetic legend about Elisha.[70] In its final form the two

69. This story was undoubtedly in existence before it was included in the Elisha cycle, perhaps in a collection with 1 Kgs 20 and 22, with which it has similarities. See, e.g., Schmitt, *Elisa*, 41–42, although he also adds 2 Kgs 6:8–23 to this collection. Wellhausen, *Composition des Hexateuchs*, 282–87, uses the parallels to attribute the three stories to the same source, along with 2 Kgs 6:24–27, and 2 Kgs 9 and 10. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 49, believe that Jehoshaphat was originally named in the second story and the similarities came about in the two episodes in the stage of oral transmission. Not only does 2 Kgs 3:4–27 have an affinity to 1 Kgs 20 and 22, it has none of the features shared either by the wonder stories or the Aramean collection in the Elisha cycle. It also interrupts the continuation of Elisha's journey to Gilgal, which is concluded in 2 Kgs 4:38, suggesting all the intervening stories are later additions. Granting that it belonged in a collection with 1 Kgs 20 and 22, we would conclude that it was inserted into the Elisha cycle when the Elijah and Elisha cycles were brought together. This also implies that it was probably the last of the episodes to be inserted into the Elisha cycle.

70. E.g. Burke O. Long, "2 Kings 3 and Genres of Prophetic Narrative," *VT* 23 (1973): 339–41. Long argues that vv. 4–9a, 16, 20–24, and 26–27 were an original tradition which was expanded to include the Elisha tradition. Using similar arguments, Volkmar Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings* (trans. A. Hagedorn; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 243, suggests that vv. 9b–17, later expanded with vv. 18–19, were a later addition. Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 279–87, analyses three different traditions separately: vv. 4–9a, 20–27, which recounts Israel and Judah going into battle

threads are woven together in such a way that the episode artfully explores and evaluates the characters of Elisha and Jehoram and the interaction between them.[71] Furthermore, this redaction must have taken place before the inclusion of this episode in the Elisha cycle because the appearance of Elisha, thought by most to be the later addition, would have been a prerequisite for association with the other Elisha stories. Thus we will analyse the story as a whole.

(1) *Jehoram*. Most commentators on 2 Kgs 3:4–27 interpret Jehoram's actions negatively. Long and Sneed describe him as a "despairing, pessimistic complainer" based on v. 10,[72] and Long says, "Jehoram seems most lame when suspecting Yahweh's intention," and writes that he compares unfavourably with Jehoshaphat.[73] Brueggemann writes that "the king's response to the drought is gratuitous and self serving: it is Yahweh's fault."[74] However, when 3:4–27 is read in isolation from the surrounding episodes, Jehoram's actions are represented more positively.

First, vv. 4–5 establish that the offence against Israel was legitimate. Verse 4 enumerates the tribute King Mesha paid to Israel, and the withdrawal of this tribute would have had a significant effect on the wealth of Israel. The verbal form ב פשע, used to describe Mesha's break from Israel in v. 5, means simply "to break away against" or "to rebel against," but it is also reminiscent of the expression פשע (used without the

against Moab; vv. 9b–13aα, 14–17, which is a prophetic episode; then this episode was expanded to include vv. 18–19, which describe the success of Israel against Moab. There are also minor expansions in v. 13aβγb, the beginning of vv. 14, 15b, 20aα. Schmitt, *Elisa*, 32, and H. Schweizer, *Elischa in den Kriegen: Literaturwissenschaftliche Untersuchung von 2 Kön 3; 6,8–23; 6,24–7,20* (SANT 37; Munich: Kösel, 1974), 82, both suggest that it was originally a war narrative that had a prophetic redaction.

71. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 31–34, argues that it cannot be an official account because it does not end with a victory. A story about a defeat must have theological purpose. He considers the shifts in the story to be an oscillation between the promise of success for Israel and the threat to that success.

72. J. C. Long and M. Sneed, "'Yahweh Has Given These Three Kings into the Hand of Moab': A Socio-Literary Reading of 2 Kings 3," in *Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East. Essays in Honor of Herbert B. Huffman* (ed. J. Kaltner and L. Stulman; JSOTSup 378; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 267.

73. Long, *2 Kings*, 47. Long writes that his judgment is influenced by the previous episode's evaluation of Jehoram in vv. 2–3.

74. Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings* (SHBC 8; Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 308.

preposition) meaning a crime committed.[75] When Jehoram sends a message to Jehoshaphat asking for help, he describes the situation again using the verb פשע, and so his depiction is confirmed by the narrator. Jehoshaphat readily and wholeheartedly agrees in v. 7, further legitimising the military venture. Jehoram has been criticised by commentators for his choice of route through the desert of Edom because it causes their thirst.[76] However, the text is ambiguous about whose idea it was to take this route, Jehoshaphat or Jehoram.[77] Thus the text emphasises the unanimity and co-operation between the kings rather than military incompetence. This is further suggested by the presence of the king of Edom who ought to have been a useful ally when journeying through the Edomite desert.[78]

Commentators have considered it significant that Jehoshaphat and Jehoram's servant, not Jehoram himself, suggest consulting the prophet.[79] However, this subtle evidence against the piety of Jehoram is outweighed by his other actions, particularly if the reader is not *a priori* biased against him. Jehoram's repeated affirmation that the Lord will deliver the three kings into the hands of the Moabites (vv. 10, 13) can be interpreted as a prophetic understanding of the true nature of the events, that it is the Lord's doing. Furthermore, it confirms his monotheism and worship of God, not the Baals. Although Jehoshaphat and his servant suggest consulting Elisha, Jehoram makes no protest, and he is the first of the three

75. See *HALOT*. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 410, writes, "signifying 'sin,' its secondary sense, it denotes specifically deliberate defiance of what is known and admitted to be the will of God."

76. E.g. Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 308. See also Bergen, *Elisha*, 73, who points out that, according to the Mesha stone, the northern cities were fortified, and therefore an approach from the south would make sense. However, he argues that this information is nowhere given in the text, and therefore a reader would assume that this was Jehoram's bad planning.

77. Most commentators, and some translators (e.g. JPS), assume that it is Jehoram's idea (see the criticism above). However, Erasmus Gass, "Topographical Considerations and Redaction Criticism in 2 Kings 3," *JBL* 128 (2009): 77, concludes that it is Jehoshaphat who suggests the route.

78. There is an incongruence that the King of Edom suddenly appears in v. 9 without previous explanation. Furthermore, according to 1 Kgs 22:48, there was a governor (נצב), not king, of Edom at this time. However, as argued by Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 44, it is not implausible that different terms would be used in different sources and they could be alternated. Note the importance of Edom ("red") in the story as wordplay on the place name (and therefore the reason for choosing the route through the desert in Edom) and the red appearance of the water.

79. Long, *2 Kings*, 41; Cohn, *2 Kings*, 21.

kings listed in v. 12 who visit him. Elisha addresses Jehoram first in v. 13, suggesting Jehoram led the contingent to consult him.

Moreover, when the episode is read alone, even Elisha's sarcastic remark to Jehoram in v. 13 does not succeed in turning the reader against Jehoram. He tells Jehoram to consult the prophets of his father and mother, but he does not directly accuse Jehoram himself of consulting the prophets of other gods. There is no other evidence in the episode that Elisha's insult was justified, especially because Jehoram immediately responds with an emphatic אַל ("no"), shunning the suggestion that he would consult the prophets of other gods. Indeed, in light of Elisha's opinion of Jehoram, it is no surprise that Jehoram was not acquainted with Elisha because he was unlikely to have offered his prophetic services to him at any point earlier.

There are salient parallels between this story and the story of the Israelites in the desert after the Exodus in Num 20:2–13, and these could potentially shape how our episode is read. In both stories there is no water in the desert, prophets intercede, and then God provides miraculously. The story in Num 20:2–13 is followed by an episode featuring Edom. Jehoram's words in 1 Kgs 3:10 and 13 echo the words of the Israelites in Num 20:3–4. However, without any other reason to evaluate Jehoram negatively, the differences between the episodes further emphasise our earlier reading: Jehoram's words are an affirmation of his belief in God and a prophecy of what is to come. Whereas in Num 20 the Israelites ought to have remembered God's promises that he would bring them into the land safely, Jehoram has no such prior assurances. Elisha is in the position that is parallel to Moses and Aaron, rather than Jehoram. Intriguingly in Num 20:2–13, it is Moses and Aaron who are punished in v. 12 for lack of faith, when they are told they will not lead the people into the land. Although Jehoram would therefore be paralleled with the people of Israel, who are also not evaluated well in this story, the lack of correspondence between Elisha and Moses encourages us not to make these identifications. This can be explained by the difference in the wording between the Israelites and Jehoram. The Israelites accuse Moses and Aaron of leading them out so that they would die, whereas Jehoram understands the role of God's sovereignty in the situation and specifically names God as the one who will hand them over to Moab. Thus, although the situation is similar to Num 20:2–13, Jehoram and Elisha do not receive the same judgment as Israel, Moses, and Aaron.

Overall, there are very few elements in the story that reflect badly on Jehoram, even subliminally, and therefore, when read in isolation, the episode is at worst ambivalent about Jehoram's devotion to God and willingness to consult the prophet.

(2) *Elisha*. We have already noted that Elisha's evaluation of Jehoram in v. 13 appears unfounded when the episode is read independently of its context. On the other hand, Elisha is endorsed both by Jehoram's servant (v. 11) and by Jehoshaphat's evaluation that the word of the Lord is with him (v. 12). Thus, at the point in the narrative where Elisha delivers his prophecy from the Lord, the audience is assured of his authority despite his unhelpfulness and quickness to judge Jehoram.[80]

As a prophet, the most significant test of Elisha's character is through the reliability and authority of his prophecy. In this particular episode, his prophecy is only questionably fulfilled, and, especially when the episode is read in isolation, it is difficult to interpret the consequence of this for our evaluation of Elisha.

When Elisha delivers his prophecy in vv. 16–19, there is no significant reason to doubt the authenticity and authority of his message. The promise of water to relieve the armies' thirst is immediately fulfilled in v. 20. Furthermore, the parallel to the Nile turning to blood in the story of the exodus emphasises the powerful nature of the miracle. In vv. 21–24 the water fulfils another purpose, enticing the Moabite army into the Israelite camp. This introduces the fulfilment of the prophecy of v. 19 in v. 25, with each of the elements of the prophecy fulfilled in reverse order.[81] The Israelites fill the land with stones, stop the springs, and fell the trees; but the momentum reaches a pause when the Israelites reach Kir-Hareseth. The tension is prolonged in v. 26, when the king of Moab is afraid but makes another attempt against the Israelite forces. The battle looks promising for Israel but they cannot yet claim victory. Then, in a startling anti-climax, the tension is resolved, not with victory but with the horrifying sacrifice of Mesha's son and the retreat of the Israelites.

The natural interpretation of this anti-climactic ending is that God does not deliver a complete victory to Israel in the battle against Moab. This is somewhat dependent on the source of the wrath in v. 27, as many commentators have discussed in great detail.[82] Although God appears to

80. For an overview of scholars who detect ambiguity in the presentation of Elisha throughout the episodes in the cycle, see Yairah Amit, "A Prophet Tested: Elisha, the Great Woman of Shunem, and the Story's Double Message," *BibInt* 11 (2003): 280.

81. Observed in Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* (NIBC: OTS 7; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), 183–84; Kissling, *Reliable Characters*, 174–75; Long and Sneed, "Socio-Literary Reading," 265.

82. Cogan and Tadmor offer a summary of solutions. קצף is most commonly used of God and so this is the solution of many scholars. It may also have been the wrath of Chemosh, but his name was edited out because it was not appropriate to the

be the most likely candidate, it is ambiguous. The question is perhaps of less importance than many commentators suggest because, assuming the sovereignty of God in the episode, whatever caused the retreat and incomplete victory of the Israelites was within divine control.[83] No reason is given for why God does not deliver victory, but presumably it is his prerogative either to send his wrath upon Israel or to allow the wrath of the Moabites or their god to drive Israel away.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on Elisha's prophecy and its fulfilment invites the reader to question why he does not predict this outcome. Some commentators have argued that a careful reading of the episode suggests that Elisha's prophecy is technically fulfilled. Verse 25 answers each of the elements in v. 19 in reverse order. The most tenuous fulfilment from v. 19 is that they will strike every city (והכיתם, "and you will strike them"), but this is answered by the repetition of the root נכה ("to strike") in v. 25 when the Israelites strike Kir-hareseth with stones (ויכוה).[84] Nevertheless, Elisha states clearly in v. 18, ונתן את־מואב בידכם ("and he will give Moab into your hand"). This is partially fulfilled in v. 24 when the Israelites smite the Moabites (and the verb נכה is used three times if we include the *qere*), but the phrase "to give into the hand" denotes a full victory, either taking the land or the life of the enemy king.[85] Thus Elisha's prophecy is not fulfilled in its entirety because v. 27 reports a retreat, not a conquest of land, and the life of Mesha is not taken.

biblical ideology. There was early rabbinic exegesis that it referred to the wrath of the king of Edom. Other scholars have suggested that it refers to the panic of Israel or the anger of the Moabites after the events (Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 46–47; see also the summary of positions in Gass, "Topographical Considerations," 80). Another more recent suggestion is that קצף refers to a plague (argued in detail in Scott Morschauser, "A 'Diagnostic' Note on the 'Great Wrath upon Israel' in 2 Kings 3:27," *JBL* 129 [2010]: 299–302).

83. This view is also held in Long and Sneed, "Socio-Literary Reading," 261. They note that the coincidence of the flood with the morning offering in v. 20 suggests the Lord's hand, and, therefore, the coincidence of the retreat of Israel with the offering of Mesha's son also suggests divine sovereignty regardless of the origin of the קצף.

84. Raymond Westbrook, "Elisha's True Prophecy in 2 Kings 3," *JBL* 124 (2005): 530–32.

85. For instance, see Josh 24:8, where the phrase is coupled with gaining possession of the land, as well as the promise in Judg 7:7, 9, which is fulfilled in 7:24 with the deaths of the leaders of Midian. In contrast, in 2 Kgs 3 the Israelites neither take the land nor the life of Mesha.

Other commentators have suggested that Elisha is deliberately deceptive in his prophecy, usually because of the parallel episode in 1 Kgs 22.[86] However, there is no explicit evidence in the episode to suggest that Jehoram or Israel actively expected victory against Moab based on Elisha's prophecy, a circumstance one would expect if the episode's primary message was this deception. In v. 24, the Moabites enter the Israelite camp—the Israelites do not attack the Moabites. Jehoram does not actively misinterpret Elisha's prophecy as a victory because he does not initiate the battle.[87] Israel merely responds to the events as they occur. Only the audience are persuaded of victory by the precise fulfilment of Elisha's prophecy in v. 25. There is no indication that the characters within the story are also persuaded and deceived.[88] It may be a narrative device to surprise the reader but not a deliberate ploy by Elisha to deceive the characters within the story.

The only remaining conclusion is that Elisha is somehow deficient as a prophet. As his prophecy is *mostly* fulfilled, we are inclined to believe that he is a true prophet but that he is limited in some way from delivering the full message from God—either because God did not tell him or because he is not a reliable messenger, albeit not a deliberately deceptive one.

The failure of Elisha's prophetic message in v. 18, that the Lord will deliver the Moabites into the hand of the Israelites, has a level of accuracy comparable to Jehoram's prediction in vv. 10 and 13 that the reverse will occur. Neither of them describes the situation exactly, but the surprise ending of the story does more to legitimise Jehoram than it does Elisha. Indeed, this appears to be the primary effect of the surprising but ambiguous conclusion to the story—the reader is shocked into reevaluating Elisha and Jehoram and being challenged about their respective roles. Despite Elisha's insubordinate refusal to help Jehoram, Jehoram proves just as effective as a prophet. Elisha remains a true prophet, but he does not have an exclusive or authoritative understanding.[89]

Finally, although Jehoshaphat is evaluated well at every point in the story, the failure of Elisha's prophetic word makes his description of

86. We will discuss these commentators and the parallels shortly.

87. As suggested by Westbrook, "Elisha's True Prophecy in 2 Kings 3," 531.

88. On the effect of this device upon the reader, rather than upon the characters in the story, see Long, *2 Kings*, 44.

89. Bergen too writes that the ending to this story forces him to rethink his evaluation of both Elisha and the prophetic role (Bergen, *Elisha*, 82–83).

Elisha in v. 12 ironic, יש אותו דבר־יהוה ("the word of the Lord is with him"). Jehoshaphat's word is not entirely accurate, again highlighting that there is truth in Jehoram's pessimism.

b. *Read with 2 Kings 3:1–3*

The episode in 2 Kgs 3:4–27 opens with a new character (King Mesha), a new location (Moab), and no indication of temporal continuity with the previous episode. The formulaic nature of 3:1–3 functions like a summarising *mise-en-abyme* for the episode in 3:4–27, which ought to be interpreted in dialogue but not in temporal sequence with it.

The negative evaluation of Jehoram and the accompanying qualifying statements in 3:1–3 create a dialogue of contradiction and corroboration with the episode in 3:4–27, producing a reinterpretation of the episodes. First, there is contradiction between the formula stating Jehoram did evil in the eyes of the Lord and the overall neutral depiction of Jehoram in vv. 4–27. As we saw above, Jehoram can be interpreted as faithful to God and as having prophetic insight when vv. 4–27 are read in isolation. The contradiction between these two episodes encourages the reader to comprehend the subtlety of the formula in 3:1–3. Despite what appears to be a definitive evaluation of Jehoram, the reader now takes greater notice of the significance that Jehoram worshipped the Israelite God, even if he worshipped idols of him. The reader may also become aware of the harshness of this evaluation in light of the more generous evaluations of other kings mentioned earlier.

The evaluation in 3:1–3 has an even more significant interpretive effect on our reading of Jehoram in vv. 4–27. As vv. 1–3 are presented first, the reader is now biased against Jehoram and more likely to notice negative elements about him and interpret ambiguous elements negatively. Knowing that Jehoram worshipped idols, we are more sceptical of his faith when he repeats that God will hand them over to Moab. In particular, the reader is more willing to interpret the parallels with Num 20 as a negative evaluation because Jehoram's words echo those of the grumbling Israelites. The Exodus parallels recall the incident of the golden calf in Exod 32, another example where Israel grumbled against Moses. A golden calf featured in the "sin of Jeroboam," which Jehoram is now also accused of, and so the parallels between Israel in the wilderness and Jehoram deepen.

The comparison by various commentators between Jehoram's pessimistic prediction and Jehoshaphat's pious petition to the prophet is now completely justified. The reader is more likely to notice that a servant, rather than Jehoram, recommends Elisha. The episode in vv. 4–27 retains its version of events as we interpreted it independently, so

Jehoram's character is not completely maligned. However, the reader is inclined to take a more negative stance when there are ambiguities in his actions.

There is also corroboration between the voices in 3:1–3 and 3:4–27. By positioning vv. 4–27 as the first story after Jehoram's accession to the throne, Jehoram is forgiven for not knowing Elisha. This in turn reinforces our suspicion against Elisha's accusation that Jehoram should not be helped because of the wickedness of his father and mother. Just as the reader has no evidence to believe Elisha's assertion when the episode is read alone, the explicit assertion in 3:1–3 that Jehoram did not follow in their footsteps strengthens the conviction that Elisha is unreasonable in this claim. Thus, although the depiction of Elisha becomes more positive in vv. 4–27 because of a more negative reading of Jehoram, there is still hesitation in our evaluation of the prophet and his words.

Finally, there is some degree of question and answer between the episodes. The negative pronouncement upon Jehoram in vv. 1–3 asks the question whether God will judge Jehoram for his worship of idols or have mercy upon him for his banishment of the Baals. The ambiguous ending in vv. 4–27 answers this in some degree by suggesting a compromise. Jehoram is not killed in battle (as Ahab was) but he also does not gain complete victory. Just as Jehoram's characterisation was a combination of good and bad, so is God's response towards him. This further eases our suspicion that Elisha delivers an inaccurate prophecy. Furthermore, the surprising incomplete victory now has a theological explanation because it can be attributed to divine wrath against Jehoram. It no longer needs to be interpreted as a comment upon Elisha's prophetic role.

In summary, the positive depiction of Jehoram in vv. 4–27 is tempered by juxtaposition with 3:1–3, and the subtle criticisms are brought to the fore by the influence of its negative bias. Conversely, Elisha's prophetic role is viewed with less suspicion. The sudden retreat of Israel at the conclusion of the episode can be interpreted as God's judgment against Jehoram for his idolatry.

c. *Another Resumptive Repetition*

We already mentioned that 2 Kgs 3:1–3 acts as a resumptive repetition of 2 Kgs 1:17, and so 2 Kgs 3:4–27 and 2:1–25 are read in parallel but 2 Kgs 3:4–27 and 1:1–18 are read in chronological sequence. The episode in 2 Kgs 3:4–27 also begins with a resumptive repetition that refers back to 2 Kgs 1:1. Using almost identical vocabulary but different syntax to 2 Kgs 3:5, 2 Kgs 1:1 begins with a notice that Moab rebelled. It then immediately departs from this subject and narrates the death of Ahaziah

(in continuity with his regnal notice in 1 Kgs 22:52–54) and the succession of Elisha to Elijah. Thus 2 Kgs 3:4–27 is *also* read in close chronological sequence with 1 Kgs 22, which immediately precedes 2 Kgs 1:1. In other words, 2 Kgs 3:4–27 must be read as a consequence of 1 Kgs 22 as well as a consequence of 2 Kgs 1. Furthermore, this resumptive repetition in 2 Kgs 3:4 and 1:17 encourages the reader to interpret the episode in 2 Kgs 3:4–27 in parallel with the material in both 2 Kgs 1:2–18 and 2:1–25 (which in turn are synchronous with one another).[90]

d. *Episodes in Parallel*

First, we will examine the parallels between 2 Kgs 3:4–27 and 2 Kgs 1 and 2. These episodes are by necessity chronologically prior to 3:4–27, but the parallels are emphasised by the resumptive repetition. In particular, our evaluation of Jehoram is affected by a comparison with the death of Ahaziah in 2 Kgs 1. Ahaziah is reprimanded for his attempt to inquire of a prophet of Baal-zebub, highlighting his apostasy. By contrast, Jehoram acknowledges only the God of Israel in 3:4–27 and attributes sovereignty to him in the battle against Moab. Furthermore, the contrast between Ahaziah's premature death in 2 Kgs 1 and Jehoram's survival of the unsuccessful campaign against Moab encourages the reader to interpret the divine mercy to Jehoram as indicating approval. It was noted earlier that the juxtaposition of the regnal formula with the episode in 3:4–27 suggests the surprise ending in 3:27 may be divine judgment against Jehoram. Therefore, although the episode in 3:4–27 does not provide any reason for God to judge Jehoram when it is read in isolation, the dialogue created by all three of these episodes suggests the wrath in 3:27 could be curtailed divine judgment against Jehoram for his incomplete devotion to the God of Israel.

The episode also contributes to the dialogue evaluating Elisha. His unwillingness to help Jehoram parallels Elijah's refusal to go to Ahaziah. Both kings specifically enquire of the prophets and are refused an audience. At this level, Elisha once again mimics his departed master as a prophet who resists the monarchic authority. This parallel suggests that Elisha is justified in his initial refusal to help Jehoram. However, differences between the two stories complicate this evaluation. Ahaziah has sinned in 2 Kgs 1, justifying the rudeness of the prophet. Elisha's only accusation against Jehoram is the sin of his parents, making his

90. This is also observed, but not explored in depth, by Long, *2 Kings*, 8, who suggests that the orderly succession of kings is under threat but that there is continuity in prophetism; Cohn, *2 Kings*, 4, describes the effect as looming trouble, which makes Ahaziah's apostasy even more ominous.

deliberate unwillingness seem unnecessary. On the other hand, it takes three petitions to Elijah before he yields and repeats the message of doom to Ahaziah. Elisha yields after only two attempts and offers a more optimistic prophecy. Although Elisha shows signs that he will be "anti-establishment" like Elijah, he is willing to cooperate with the monarch to some small degree.

On the whole, the failure of the Israelites at the end of 3:27 comes as a surprise to the audience, but there are certain repeated words from the previous episodes that hint all will not be well. In 2 Kgs 1 the root עלה ("to go up") is used repeatedly in connection with the oracle against Ahaziah and against the commanders with their armies who are swallowed up in fire when they visit Elijah. It is also repeated in the taunt by the youths against Elisha resulting in his curse in 2 Kgs 2:23. Thus its repetition in 3:7–8, 20, and 21 are a subtly ominous precursor to 3:27 where it is used of the offering of Mesha's son.[91] A similar sense of foreboding is achieved though the use of קלל in Elisha's reassurance in נקל זאת בעיני יהוה ("This is an easy thing in the eyes of the Lord"). In the episode of the bears near Bethel in 2:23–25, the same root is used with a different meaning to curse the youths, ויקללם בשם יהוה ("and he cursed them in the name of the Lord").[92] While the use of the root may act only as a subtle wordplay in 3:4–27 when it is read alone, the juxtaposition in parallel with 2:23–25 brings the wordplay to the fore.

This leads us to a comparison with 2 Kgs 2. When 3:4–27 was read alone, Elisha's failure to predict the Israelites' retreat in v. 27 was interpreted as a failure of his prophetic word. The accuracy of the rest of his oracle suggests that he is a true prophet, but his prediction ונתן את־מואב בידכם ("and he will give Moab into your hands") is not fulfilled in its entirety. This message enters into dialogue with the two episodes in 2 Kgs 2:19–22 and 23–25, which also address the authority of Elisha's prophetic word. These two short episodes confirm the power of Elisha's word, as summed up in v. 22, כדבר אלישע אשר דבר ("according to the word of Elisha which he spoke"). In the first story, the prophetic word brought life because it healed the spring, and in the second it brought

91. These leading words have been observed in 2 Kgs 1–2 by several commentators including, Lundbom, "Elijah's Chariot Ride," 46, and Long, *2 Kings*, 9. Long and Sneed, "Socio-Literary Reading," 260–61, observe the phenomena and specifically attribute it to the defeat of the king by Yahweh. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 11, observes the repetition in ch. 1 and says it introduces movement into the story. He also notices the parallel with ch. 3: in both stories the odds are with the commanders and the kings who are "ascending" and then this expectation is overturned (p. 33).

92. Observed also in the articles by Jesse C. Long.

death because the prophet cursed the children. However, the two stories corroborate each other in that Elisha's word brings about an immediate effect. This is now contradicted by 3:4–27 where Elisha's word is not confirmed.

Yet these opposing ideas are embedded in different stories that give a different context to Elisha's prophetic word. In 2:19–22 the men of Jericho ask Elisha to perform a specific miracle for them, to heal their water supply. Similarly, in 2:23–25 Elisha makes a specific request of the Lord, wishing a curse upon the children who have insulted him. However, in 3:4–27 the kings of Israel and Judah do not ask Elisha to solve their problem for them but rather wish to inquire of the Lord through him (v. 11, ונדרשה את־יהוה מאותו, "[so that] we may inquire of the Lord from him"). They are asking for foreknowledge, not for a miracle.[93] Indeed, Elisha delivers the miracles that are needed by the kings, even though they do not specifically ask for them. Water comes to supply their needs for the army and cattle and, simultaneously, to deceive and weaken the enemy. Only Elisha's attempt at foreknowledge, that the Israelites will finally have the Moabites delivered into their hands, is not fulfilled. Thus the dialogue created by these three episodes refines our understanding of the power of Elisha's prophetic word. His word is powerful to perform miracles, but something more complex is occurring when he predicts the future and his word is not reliable.

Through this process of creating a new, more complex meaning, the negative reading in 3:4–27 is improved by its contradiction with the two surrounding episodes. They function as a corrective to a negative evaluation of Elisha and encourage us to emphasise his power rather than his failure.

e. *An Episode in Chronological Sequence*

The resumptive repetition also contains a time designation, "after the death of Ahab," which directs the reader to the episode that is chronologically prior to our story. In this case, it directs our interpretive attention to 1 Kgs 22:1–39. Although this episode is not juxtaposed to 2 Kgs 3:4–27 in the presentation of the events, the chronological sequence encourages the same type of chronological interpretation as when the episodes are spatially juxtaposed in time sequence. These stories have particularly close affinities, and so it is worth briefly analysing them here.

93. Compare, e.g., 2 Kgs 8:8, where a king also wants to "inquire of the Lord" (ודרשת את־יהוה מאותו), and it is clearer that he is asking for foreknowledge not a miracle because his question is, "will I recover?" (האחיה מחלי זה).

There are close parallels in plot between the two episodes as Jehoshaphat joins a king of Israel in a battle against a foreign enemy, they consult a prophet, and they are ultimately unsuccessful. Furthermore, there are verbal parallels between the two episodes, including: התלך אתי ("will you go with me") and ויאמר אעלה כמוני כמוך כעמי כעמך כסוסי כסוסיך ("and he said, 'I will go up; I am as you are; my people are like your people; my horses are like your horses'") in 1 Kgs 22:4 and 2 Kgs 3:7; and the similar statements, ויאמר יהושפט האין פה נביא ליהוה עוד ונדרשה מאותו ("And Jehoshaphat said, 'Is there not another prophet of the Lord that we might inquire of him?'") in 1 Kgs 22:7 and ויאמר יהושפט האין פה נביא ליהוה ונדרשה את יהוה מאותו ("and Jehoshaphat said, 'Is there not a prophet of the Lord that we might inquire of him?'") in 2 Kgs 3:11. Not only have these parallels been used as a basis for understanding the literary history of these two episodes, several commentators have also seen the importance of the parallels for the interpretation of 2 Kgs 3:4–27. It is suggested that the parallels imply God is enticing Jehoram into battle and Elisha is in on the deception, just as Micaiah knew of the deception to entice Ahab into battle.[94] The lack of proximity between the episodes and the other differences (e.g. Elisha does not have a reputation as a bearer of bad news, and there is no crowd of prophets) prevent a deceptive prophecy in 2 Kgs 3 from being an interpretive imperative. However, it presents itself as a possibility. Whereas our readings of 3:4–27 up to this point only allowed a deception of the reader by the narrator, now a deception of Jehoram and Jehoshaphat by God and Elisha is also likely. Ironically, this reinstates Elisha's credibility as a prophet, because his failure to mention that Israel will not have complete victory over Moab can be attributed to a divine plan for enticing Jehoram into battle through Elisha, rather than to the limitations of Elisha's knowledge or prophetic role.

94. Kissling, *Reliable Characters*, 182–83; Long and Sneed, "Socio-Literary Reading," 259–60. They also suggest that the overt parallels make it unnecessary to present a scene in heaven (such as in 1 Kgs 22:19–23) or even to state that Elisha was giving a false prophecy because the similarities are so pronounced. Similarly, they suppose that Jehoshaphat and Jehoram inquired of the Lord prior to going into battle based on analogy with 1 Kgs 22:5–6. This is discussed also in other articles by Jesse Long: "Unfulfilled Prophecy or Divine Deception? A Literary Reading of 2 Kings 3," *SCJ* 7 (2004): 101–17; and "Elisha's Deceptive Prophecy in 2 Kings 3: A Response to Raymond Westbrook," *JBL* 126 (2007): 168–71. However, this assumption overlooks that the differences in parallel stories are just as important as the similarities, and the omission is more likely to point to a difference than another assumed similarity. Bergen, *Elisha*, 75, also notes the possibility that there is a parallel that Elisha is lying, but he dismisses it on the basis that Elisha is proved elsewhere in the episode to be a true prophet.

Secondly, this parallel is another factor that may decrease the reader's surprise at the unsuccessful ending of the story. Just as the root עלה ("to go up") is a foreboding hint, the possibility that Elisha has been deceptive, and the analogy with Ahab's death, is an ominous warning that the episode may not end with the straightforward victory promised by Elisha. Indeed, the sparing of Jehoram, in comparison to the death of Ahab, corroborates the interpretation that the ending in 3:4–27 is a divine judgment, mitigated on account of Jehoram deviating from his father's footsteps.

The chronological sequence of episodes encourages a chronological interpretation of them; and so background information, causes, and consequences between the episodes affect our interpretation of 3:4–27. First, the previous episode justifies both Elisha's hesitation to help Jehoram on account of the sins of Ahab and Elisha's preference for King Jehoshaphat. On the other hand, the chronological sequence causes us to question why Jehoshaphat agrees to engage in a battle after the abysmal failure of the last joint venture with Israel. His willingness to enter into this type of military offensive with an Israelite king after the failure against Aram suggests that he had good reason to believe the battle against Moab was justified. This reading corroborates the depiction in 3:4–27 that Jehoram was wronged by Mesha and that Jehoshaphat's agreement indicates approval of him.

In summary, the outlying episodes in 1 Kgs 22 and 2 Kgs 1 encourage us to ask whether Elisha is deliberately deceiving Jehoram. However, the final editor has instead juxtaposed these episodes with 3:1–3. This makes a final reading tend towards a negative evaluation of the king of Israel and inclines us to attribute the best intentions towards Elisha.

f. *Read with 2 Kings 4:1–7*

The episode positioned after 3:4–27 is also important for its interpretation. The episode in 4:1–7 begins with new *dramatis personae* when the narrative shifts from King Mesha and the Israelite army, to a widow and the prophet Elisha. Furthermore, the whole sphere of narrative shifts from a public battle of political importance to a private scene in a woman's home.[95] The new setting, new characters, and the absence of any time designation suggest that the episodes are not chronologically sequential and so ought to be interpreted in parallel.

95. Second Kings 4:1–7 is classified in Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 13–22, as a *legenda*, compared to the political *legenda* in the previous episode. The diverse origins accentuate the achronological sequence because the editor does not insert any chronological markers and there was probably no relationship at any previous stage of the episodes' histories.

The numerous plot parallels and verbal repetitions between these episodes direct the audience to the points of interpretive dialogue between them. Most palpable is the thematic parallel that through Elisha there is a miraculous provision of water/oil. This is highlighted by the repetition of מלא ("to fill") in 3:17, 20, and 4:4, 6 to describe both miracles. Further verbal links are found in the repetition of the root יצק ("to pour") in 3:11 and 4:4, 5, and the repetition of נסע ("to set aside" in the *hiphil* in 4:4; "withdraw" in the *qal* in 3:27).[96] The parallel placement of נסע at the conclusion of each miracle strengthens the link. Children are important to both stories, with both Mesha's son and the widow's sons playing key roles.[97] Once these overt connections have been identified, the audience is encouraged to look for more subtle connections. In each episode the prophet Elisha helps three people: the three kings in 3:4–27; and the woman and her two children in 4:1–7. In each episode Elisha needs to be convinced to perform the miracle (3:13–15; 4:1), and in each he addresses two problems with one miracle. The water in the desert both satisfies the thirst of the army and deceives the Moabites; and the oil both feeds the woman and her family and provides money to pay the creditor.

These verbal and thematic links direct our attention to the character of Elisha and his miracles, and their interpretation will be affected by the juxtaposition. The juxtaposition contributes to our understanding of whether the failure of Israel at the end of 3:4–27 also indicates a failure of Elisha in the prophetic role. The success of Elisha's miracle in 4:1–7 demonstrates the effectiveness of his power, and the difference between the endings in these miracles is emphasised by the repetition of נסע. In the first it is used to indicate failure as Israel withdraws from their assault on Kir-hareseth (3:27, ויסעו מעליו, "and they withdrew from him"); and in the second it is used to describe the jars full of oil (4:4, והמלא תסיעי, "you will set aside the full"). In the first it is used at the climax to indicate failure; and in the second, success. The contrast proves that Elisha is a capable and powerful prophet, whatever his failure in 3:4–27. It encourages readers to be generous in their evaluation because he is demonstrably a true prophet.

96. These verbal and thematic links are observed in Yael Shemesh, "Elisha and the Miraculous Jug of Oil (2 Kgs 4:1–7)," *JHS* 8 (2008): 3–4. Shemesh also lists the phonetic repetition of נשא ("to respect" in 3:14) and נשה ("creditor" in 4:1). However, these verses are used in very different contexts to describe different themes and so are not similar enough to have a particularly strong effect on the interpretation.

97. Note that children form a link across all the stories from 2 Kgs 2:19–4:37. There is a progression from 40 children being killed in 2:19–25, to one child killed in 3:4–27, to two children being saved from slavery in 4:1–7, to life being given to a child in 4:8–37. We will comment further on this development shortly.

Finally, the two episodes complement one another in their depiction of Elisha's prophetic role. In the first episode he is in a servant role. He is described as the servant of Elijah in v. 11 (through the idiom אשר יצק מים על ידי אליהו, "he who poured water upon the hands of Elijah," a pun also on the miracles he is about to perform). Although he is insubordinate towards King Jehoram, he is depicted as socially inferior because he is known only by a servant. In the second episode the widow describes her husband twice to Elisha as עבדך ("your servant") and herself as שפחתך ("your maidservant"). Now Elisha is in the position of master and there is a reversal of the roles. These different aspects of Elisha give texture to the depiction of his ministry by showing him in different spheres.

Our analysis has charted many different shifts in the interpretation of this episode. The independent episode began with an ambiguous characterisation of Elisha: his prophecy is unfulfilled and there is a comparatively positive depiction of Jehoram. Then, in chronological sequence with 1 Kgs 22 it became an interpretive possibility that Elisha was being deliberately deceptive. Within the Elisha cycle this interpretation was less likely, and instead the context emphasised that Elisha's word was powerful. This corrected a negative reading of Elisha but simultaneously created a more nuanced depiction of his character. The final editorial insertion of 3:1–3 further improved the depiction of Elisha because it biased the reader towards a negative reading of Jehoram.

7. *2 Kings 4:1–7*

The story of provision of oil to a widow in 4:1–7 shows signs of being written later than the other wonder stories of Elisha. It was probably dependent on the parallel story of Elijah in 1 Kgs 17,[98] and it contains a

98. Most scholars believe the dependency lies in the other direction based on a number of details in 1 Kgs 17 which make better sense in 2 Kgs 4 (e.g. Schmitt, *Elisa*, 454–55; Stipp, *Elischa*, 451–58; Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 132–33; McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings*, 82; White, *Jehu's Coup*, 12–16). I will review these details shortly when we look at 2 Kgs 4:8–37 (see the following note), and see White, *Jehu's Coup*, 12–16, for a compilation of all the details that suit the Elisha story better than the Elijah story. In defence of our argument, we note that from the details, which belong better in 2 Kgs 4, only one pertains to 4:1–7. McKenzie points out that the Zarephath widow's familiarity with Elijah is not explained, whereas in the Elisha story it is explained by the husband being one of the sons of the prophets. However, I would argue that this *is* explained by there being a famine and God commanding Elisha to go there in v. 9. There are no other possible details in the Elijah version which need 2 Kgs 4:1–7 to explain them; all the other dependent details occur in the Shunammite story. Thus the Shunammite story was indeed prior, but the same

different conception of who the sons of the prophets are.[99] We do not know whether it was inserted before or after the time 2 Kgs 3:4–27 was inserted, and so we will again interpret this story only in its final form.

a. *2 Kings 4:1–7 Read Independently*

Read in isolation, this story emphasises the power of Elisha to perform a miracle, as well as the poverty and piety of the widow he rescues. In the previous miracle in 3:4–27, and the similar provision of oil in 1 Kgs 17:7–16, the prophet delivers an oracle from the Lord announcing the future miraculous events, introduced by כה אמר יהוה ("thus says the Lord"). In 4:1–7, however, Elisha himself announces the miraculous event to the widow as his own words. God is only mentioned with reference to the piety of the widow's husband in v. 1 and in the title of Elisha as איש האלהים ("the man of God") in v. 7. Although these indirect references frame the story, the miracle itself is not explicitly attributed to God. The woman repeats to Elisha that her husband was עבדך ("your servant"), and Elisha asks מה אעשה־לך ("what shall I do for you?"),[100]

argument cannot be used for the widow in 2 Kgs 4:1–7. In agreement with the priority of 4:8–37 but not 4:1–7 are Šanda, *Könige. II*, 79, and Maeijer, *Elisha as a Second Elijah*, 79.

99. In the other stories the sons of the prophets are an isolated community who have an association with Elijah and Elisha but are not necessarily servants. Elisha has other servants, such as Gehazi, who are not among the sons of the prophets. For example, in 2 Kgs 2:5 they are a community at Jericho who refer to Elijah in v. 16 as "your master" (אדניך) when speaking to Elisha, not as "our master." In 2 Kgs 4:38–41 and 42–44 they are again an isolated community. In 6:1–7 they are self-sufficient, but they ask Elisha to accompany them to their new location by the Jordan. By contrast, in 2 Kgs 4:1–7 one of the sons of the prophets has a wife and child, which does not harmonise well with the community of men in isolated locations. Furthermore, the widow describes her husband as "your servant" (עבדך), implying that the sons of the prophets had Elisha as their master, as opposed to the less formal relationship of teacher and occasional provider in difficult situations. This suggests 2 Kgs 4:1–7 arose at a later time than the former stories when an understanding of the sons of the prophets was lost. Furthermore, the description of the woman's husband in this story is that he feared the Lord (היה ירא את־יהוה), a phrase also found in 1 Kgs 18:3 as a description of Obadiah. This parallel is further enforced by the repetition of עבד three times in 2 Kgs 4:1, a play on Obadiah's name (עבדיהו). This suggests the narrators of the story have combined the role of a prophet such as Obadiah with the sons of the prophets, even taking the description of him and applying it to the now unnamed son of the prophets. This identification is made in Josephus, *Ant.* 9.4.2.

100. Note also that this phrase echoes Elijah's words to Elisha in 2 Kgs 2:9. This again parallels Elisha with Elijah, and gives additional evidence that the story was composed after 2 Kgs 2 and at the time the Elijah and Elisha cycles were joined.

demonstrating that the relationship and resulting transaction are between the woman and Elisha. Although the intervention of God is inevitably implied in the miracle, Elisha speaks on his own behalf, not as an oracle from the Lord. Elisha, not God, is at the focal point of the story. This does not suggest that Elisha is taking the position of God. His role as powerful prophet was the concern of the author, rather than a theological statement about the intervention of God.

The miracle performed by Elisha is effective and answers the needs of the woman and her sons. The oil stops only after the woman has no more empty vessels, and afterwards she has enough to pay the debt and to provide for her future. There are a number of reversals in the story which emphasise the sufficiency of the provision: in v. 1 her husband is dead (מת), then in v. 7 there is enough to live on (תחיי); in v. 1 the creditor is coming to take her children, then in v. 7 she can repay her debt; in v. 3 the widow is told to take empty vessels (כלים רקים), and in v. 6 it is confirmed that they have become full (כמלאת הכלים); in v. 1 the widow "cries out" (צעק), then in v. 5 the oil is "poured out" (יצק). Elisha's miracle is powerful and effective at relieving the woman's situation.

The other emphasis of the story is on the woman's extreme need. A widow is a typically needy member of society for whom there are many special provisions made in the law.[101] This particular widow is now threatened with losing her children as well as her husband because of the creditor and, apart from them, she has only a small jar of oil (v. 2). She humbles herself by crying out (צעקה) to Elisha, an act for which there is no context—we do not know whether he was walking along the street near her home or whether she sought him out. Her anonymity and stereotypical role as a poor widow make her a generic character, one of possibly many in Israel who were in need and who feared God.[102] Furthermore, she is obedient to all Elisha's instructions, demonstrated by their repetition in her actions: she closes the doors, fills the empty jars, and returns to Elisha for further instructions.

This emphasis points to the interpretation that Elisha is a powerful prophet. The reversal of the woman's situation by the provision of oil

101. Bergen, *Elisha*, 84–85, even suggests that Elisha was obliged to help her.

102. Adele Reinhartz writes, "The generic nature of role designations lends a paradigmatic quality to the unnamed characters, even when personal identity is very much apparent" (Adele Reinhartz, *"Why Ask My Name?": Anonymity and Identity in Biblical Narrative* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1998], 188). She also writes concerning 2 Kgs 4:1–7 and 1 Kgs 17 that the anonymity of the women draws attention to their widowhood and how the prophet takes on the role of husband by providing for them (p. 94).

shows that he has the power to bring sufficiency to the most wretched situation. It increases our admiration of him because he has compassion and offers encouragement to the faithful and needy.

b. *2 Kings 4:1–7 Read with 2 Kings 3:4–27*

This juxtaposition adds a political dimension to the domestic reading of 4:1–7 in isolation. The placement of this story after the regnal formula in 3:1–3 and the story of Jehoram in 3:4–27 implies that the events are within his reign, despite him not being named. Furthermore, the abrupt and unexplained ending of 3:27 leaves the audience pondering the future of Moabite–Israelite–Judean political relations. We are inclined to seek answers in the following episode, even if it begins with a new theme and setting.

The impressive problem-solving power of Elisha contrasts with Jehoram and even Jehoshaphat in the previous episode. Elisha is now in the position of master to the widow's husband, and there is a direct allusion to the other sons of the prophets (בני־הנביאים), presumably a group of prophets who considered Elisha their prophetic father.[103] Thus there is an analogy between Elisha and the kings of Israel and Judah in the way that they provide for those dependent upon them. In contrast to the kings' failure, Elisha provides immediately for this woman. Elisha's power is even more pronounced in direct juxtaposition with 3:27, which leaves the reader with an awareness of the limitations of the king of Israel in the face of Mesha's shocking sacrifice of his son. By contrast, Elisha's miracle is successful, and this gives hope in the context of uncertainty. Elisha is powerful despite the failings of the king of Israel and even his own failure to predict the outcome of the war with Moab. A localised tale of a miracle for one woman and her two sons is transformed into a subtle comment on the inadequacies of Israel's monarchy and a suggestion of hope in the prophetic role.

However, the juxtaposition with Elisha's incomplete prophecy in 3:4–27 draws attention to the subtle limitations in Elisha's ability in 4:1–7. Cohn reads Elisha's question in 4:2, מה אעשה־לך ("what shall I do for you?"), as an indication that Elisha lacks omniscience.[104] As it was previously noted in our reading of 3:4–27, the oil ceases once the vessels

103. See, e.g., James G. Williams, "Prophetic 'Father': A Brief Explanation of the Term "Sons of the Prophets," " *JBL* 85 (1966): 344–48. Note that this is not the depiction of the sons of the prophets in the other episodes where Elisha has no evident responsibility for them as master.

104. Cohn, *2 Kings*, 25.

are full, giving sufficient relief to the widow but not an over-abundance. The overall effect of the story is undoubtedly praise of Elisha's powerful miracle, but it is possible to observe his limitations.

c. *2 Kings 4:1–7 Read with 2 Kings 4:8–37*

We have argued that this episode was deliberately composed to be placed before the story of the Shunammite woman and to create a parallel with Elijah and the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kgs 17. This juxtaposition is therefore very important for the interpretation of 2 Kgs 4:1–7. There is another echo of Elijah in 4:1–7 when Elisha asks, מה אעשה־לך ("what shall I do for you?"), a direct repetition of Elijah's question to Elisha in 2 Kgs 2:9.[105] Second Kings 4:1–7 and 4:8–37 dialogue with each other, and the resulting conversation enters dialogue with the Elijah story.

The dialogue between the juxtaposed episodes is encouraged by parallels between them. Elisha's power to perform miracles is intensified in the story of the Shunammite woman. In both stories, children are rescued as a gift to their respective parents, first from slavery, and then from death in the case of the Shunammite woman. The miracles occur behind closed doors in 4:4–5 and 4:33, emphasising that the miracle is performed in private for the benefit of individuals. Furthermore, this may be intended as a magical act, which is sustained by the focus on Elisha's power rather than on God's role in the miracle. God is also not mentioned by Elisha when he foretells the birth of the woman's son in 4:16.

Two consecutive stories that minimise the role of God and emphasise the prophet Elisha draw the reader's attention to this subtle aspect of the stories. It contrasts sharply with the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath where God is mentioned multiple times as the source of Elijah's power. It is interesting that this contrast is reinforced, not lessened, by the addition of 2 Kgs 4:1–7 to the story of the Shunammite woman. By juxtaposing these episodes, the editor did not seek to correct this depiction of Elisha but rather to underline it.

Another parallel aspect of the stories is the piety of each woman (or her husband) towards God and more particularly their loyalty towards Elisha. In the story of the Shunammite woman, the woman shows Elisha hospitality and refers to herself as שפחתך, "your maidservant," in 4:16. The reason for her hospitality in 4:9–10 is that he is a holy man of God (איש אלהים קדוש), demonstrating the Shunammite's piety. Compared to Elisha's reluctance to help Jehoram in ch. 3, he is very willing to help

105. On more similarities and differences between 2 Kgs 4:1–7 and 1 Kgs 17, see Shemesh, "Elisha and the Miraculous Jug," 16.

these two women. He is persuaded to help the widow after she gives a number of convincing reasons, and now he offers the Shunammite woman a son without her even asking. The increasing loyalty of the recipients towards Elisha coincides with his increasing willingness to perform the miracle. Thus the juxtaposition reinforces that successful miracles are performed for the pious. Interestingly, however, the Shunammite woman is rich, and so the poverty and extreme need of the widow do not reappear as requirements for Elisha's generosity. This aspect of the widow's story is complemented by Elisha's provision to a woman who needs nothing. It makes us rethink whether Elisha's care for the poor and needy is really the meaning of the previous episode in 4:1–7.

The episode of the widow of Zarephath can be profitably compared to 2 Kgs 4 in terms of how they were each integrated into their surroundings in the final form. The provision of oil to the widow and the raising of the young boy from the dead are combined in one story in 1 Kgs 17, so that there is a strict chronological ordering of these two events. This is in contrast to the widow in 2 Kgs 4:1–7 who has no connection of geography or chronological sequence with the Shunammite woman. Furthermore, the story of the widow of Zarephath is linked in chronological sequence with the surrounding episodes concerning Ahab, and so it is not just interpreted in parallel with them but in a cause and effect relationship. The widow of Zarephath is poor specifically because of the famine in the land, which, in turn, is a result of Ahab worshipping the Baals (1 Kgs 16:29–17:1). Ahab is responsible for the desperate plight of the widow, and Elijah is deliberately reversing these effects for his own survival. By contrast, there is no implication that the widow in 2 Kgs 4:1–7 is in need because of the neglect of the king. Elisha may be more effective than the king at solving problems. However, Jehoram is not morally responsible for her distress because there is no chronological sequence between his failings in ch. 3 and the episode in 4:1–7. This widow is in need only because of her position in society.

8. *2 Kings 4:8–37*

There is evidence that the Shunammite story in 4:8–37 was added later to the collection of Elisha stories already containing 1 Kgs 19:19–21; 2 Kgs 2; 4:38–44; 6:1–7, and 13:20–21. It separates the journey of Elisha in 2 Kgs 2 from his destination at Gilgal in 2 Kgs 4:38. Furthermore, it represents a different type of story that is more developed than the shorter wonder stories, particularly in terms of characterisation and

complexity of plot.[106] On the other hand, it reflects similar interests to the other stories in this collection: Elisha is an itinerant prophet who performs miracles for the common people of Israel. Therefore, 2 Kgs 4:8–37 probably came from a similar context but was developed later and added to the already existing collection of stories.[107] Finally, although we argued 2 Kgs 4:1–7 was written after 1 Kgs 17, the evidence also suggests that 1 Kgs 17 was originally dependent upon 2 Kgs 4:8–37.[108] Thus 2 Kgs 4:8–37 was probably inserted into the wonder collection story before 2 Kgs 4:1–7 and may have been juxtaposed at one stage with 2 Kgs 2:23–25.

a. *2 Kings 4:8–37 Read Independently*

In contrast to the short episode about the provision of oil to the widow, the episode of the Shunammite woman is an intricate tale containing deeper characterisation and a number of twists in its plot. The story of the Shunammite contains different levels of meaning even when read independently. The episode is composed of two scenes in vv. 8–18a and vv. 18b–37, which are linked chronologically, and these affect the interpretation by their cause and effect relationship.[109] Although these scenes probably always belonged together in a continuous narrative, their division is important from the point of view of plot. The reader is left

106. Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 27.

107. Probably as a written rather than oral composition because of its complexity.

108. Schmitt, *Elisa*, 153–54; Stipp, *Elischa*, 451–58; McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings*, 82. There are a number of details shared in the two stories that are appropriate to the Elisha story but out of place in the Elijah story. Elisha's upper room is integrated into the plot because it is the reason for him wishing to reward the Shunammite, but there is no reason for Elijah to be staying in an upper room in 1 Kgs 17:19, 23. The Shunammite has good reason for blaming Elisha for the death of her son because it was he who promised his birth. However, the accusations by the widow of Zarephath in 17:18 have no reason. Finally, Elisha is commonly referred to as a man of God, but this is the only occurrence where Elijah is a man of God (1 Kgs 17:18, 24) apart from the story in 2 Kgs 1. Cf. Gressman, *Die älteste Geschichtsschreibung*, 294. Gressman finds more artistic merit in the Shunammite story and so proposes that it is secondary. Conversely, Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 132–33, argues that 1 Kgs 17 is better integrated into its context and so it is secondary.

109. Note the first scene is also divided into two sections, which are marked by the repetition of ויהי היום ("and it happened that day") in 4:8 and 11. However, as the first of these sections (vv. 8–10) is background information without dramatic tension, it cannot be considered an independent scene for our purposes.

with a sense of resolution at the conclusion of the first scene, only to be unsettled by the second scene. The two episodes relate dialogically with one another in the same way that episodes relate to one another when juxtaposed by an editor.

(1) *Scene 1: vv. 8–18a*. The dominant concern of the opening of vv. 8–18a is to establish the worthy character of the Shunammite woman. She is given the epithet גדולה ("great"), which is initially ambiguous. It usually implies wealth, and this is obviously the case as she can afford to build an additional room for Elisha. It also suggests status and social esteem[110] as well as moral greatness. This last connotation is given emphasis in vv. 8–10 through the woman's generosity and initiative, particularly in contrast to her husband. She gives Elisha food as often as he passes by (מדי עברו), and, from her own initiative, she has the upper room built and furnished for him and his comfort. Verse 10 alerts the reader to the existence of her husband and puts further emphasis on the greatness of her personality rather than her wealth—the wealth belonged to her husband, but the generosity stemmed from her own greatness. Thus she, not her husband, is given the epithet (ה)גדול ("great").

Furthermore, the woman's declaration in v. 9 that Elisha is a holy man of God (כי איש אלהים קדוש) establishes her respect for God's prophet and therefore her piety towards God.[111] Verse 13 completes this portrait by revealing that the motive for her generosity was not the hope of a return favour from the man of God. Simultaneous to this description of the Shunammite woman's character and actions, the prophet Elisha is implicitly extolled. Her description of Elisha as holy, and her desire to accommodate him, impresses upon the reader his importance as an itinerant man of God.

Dramatic tension finally enters the plot in vv. 12–13 when Elisha asks what he can do for the Shunammite. It is noteworthy that this is the dramatic tension of the story, and the fact that the woman has no son is mentioned only in the attempt to resolve Elisha's own sense of obligation.

110. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 56.

111. Contrast the widow of Zarephath who does not acknowledge Elijah is a man of God until after he has raised her son from the dead (1 Kgs 17:24). As expressed in Jopie Siebert-Hommes, "The Widow of Zarephath and the Great Woman of Shunem: A Comparative Analysis of Two Stories," in *On Reading Prophetic Texts* (ed. B. Becking and M. Dijkstra; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 250, the Shunammite woman begins where the widow of Zaraphath ends.

The section then develops into an annunciation *type scene*. The woman has no sons, her husband is old, and so Elisha promises her a son. His words in v. 16 למועד הזה כעת חיה אתי [את] חבקת בן ("at this season next year[112] you will embrace a son"), echo the promise to Abraham that Sarah would bear Isaac in Gen 18:10, אשוב אליך כעת חיה והנה־בן לשרה אשתך ("I will return to you at this time next year and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son"). The Shunammite makes a customary expression of disbelief, similar to Sarah's laughter in Gen 18, before the narrator promptly relates that the annunciation was fulfilled.[113]

Thus the first scene concludes with a happy ending to a story without any great tension or conflict. The Shunammite woman is generous towards Elisha, he is generous towards the Shunammite in return, and she bears a son. All the events in the story are evaluated as positive and beneficial for both the prophet and his host. Elisha is a holy prophet with the power to do an amazing miracle, and the Shunammite woman is a worthy recipient.

Despite this positive conclusion, there are a number of unusual elements in the story that are not developed and so do not have meaning until the next scene. Many commentators have noted elements missing from the type scene or variations on it.[114] The woman is not called "barren," in contrast with the stories of Sarah (Gen 11:30), Rebekah (Gen 25:21), Rachel (Gen 29:31), Samson's mother (Judg 13:3), and Hannah whose womb was closed, סגר רחמה, in 1 Sam 1:5. Indeed, Gehazi reports that she does not have any sons, and so it is possible that she has daughters.[115] Secondly, God's messengers in the stories of Sarah and Samson's mother are all-knowing, understanding both the woman's situation (Gen 18:10–14; Judg 13:1) and foretelling the upcoming birth. Instead, Elisha's ignorance that the Shunammite has no son is reminiscent of Eli's flawed annunciation where he mistakes Hannah's sorrow

112. On this translation, see Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 57.

113. Long, *2 Kings*, 56, suggests that this swift report mocks the woman's objection. However, almost as quickly, her doubts become justified in the following verses.

114. E.g. Robert Alter, "How Convention Helps Us Read: The Case of the Bible's Annunciation Type-Scene," *Proof* 3 (1983): 125–26. See also Burke O. Long, "A Figure at the Gate: Readers, Reading, and Biblical Theologians," in *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Brevard S Childs* (ed. G. M. Tucker, D. L. Petersen, and R. R. Wilson; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 171; Mark Roncace, "Elisha and the Woman of Shunem: 2 Kings 4:8–37 and 8:1–6 Read in Conjunction," *JSOT* 91 (2000): 116–17.

115. Roncace, "Elisha and the Woman of Shunem," 115.

for drunkenness (1 Sam 1:14). Furthermore, although Elisha will finally deliver the news of a son directly to the Shunammite in v. 16, he initially sends Gehazi as his messenger, elevating himself to the role normally performed by God. In v. 12 Elisha calls the Shunammite to the door, but then in v. 13 he talks to Gehazi about her as if she is not present (אמר־נא אל יה, "please say to her"). He does not speak to her directly until v. 16, and even then she remains at the doorway.[116] The casting of Elisha as the one who sends messengers, rather than being the messenger, is suggested again in the next scene where the woman gives birth "as Elisha said to her" (v. 17; אשר־דבר אל יה אל ישע). This is in contrast to Gen 21:2 where Sarah gives birth to Isaac as the Lord had said (אשר־דבר אתו אל הים, "as God said to him").[117] Finally, the son is not given a name, and there is no indication that he will grow up to be a significant person in the life of Israel like Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samson, or Samuel. Overall, this scene ends with a satisfying resolution; but the variations on the annunciation type scene leave open some questions that will be given meaning and significance in the next scene.

(2) *Scene 2: vv. 18b–37*. The ensuing scene describes the consequences of vv. 8–18a, and these consequences dramatically alter the reader's interpretation of the resolution in v. 17. Instead of the child becoming a great figure in Israel, suggested by an annunciation type scene, he dies and the Shunammite woman confronts Elisha. In this confrontation, a number of the unsettling elements from the first half of the story come to the fore and take on a significant meaning.

First, the depiction of Elisha as a revered holy man, as a God-like figure, is deconstructed by his ignorance of the Shunammite's problem. As he himself says, the Lord has hidden the problem from him (v. 27, ויהוה העל ים ממני). This emphasises the limitations in his knowledge and makes his God-like role in the annunciation scene somewhat ironic. The reader is now more likely to notice Elisha's strange ignorance that the woman did not have any sons in the first scene. He was accustomed to staying in her house and so ought to have known how many children she

116. This is further complicated by the ambiguity in v. 12, ותעמד לפניו, "she stood before him," where it is not clear who "him" is. It is most likely Gehazi, although it may also indicate respect towards Elisha (Bergen, *Elisha*, 92–93). Long, *2 Kings*, 55, proposes that the repetition of the woman standing is a resumptive repetition, but this does not account for the repetition of Gehazi calling her.

117. Bergen, *Elisha*, 92. As we will see later, Elisha will again send Gehazi as his messenger in 4:29 to heal the young boy rather than attend himself.

had. Elisha's ignorance contrasts with the Shunammite's knowledge: she recognises that Elisha is a man of God in v. 9 (note the use of ידעתי);[118] and then quickly perceives her need of him in her distress.

Secondly, Elisha's power and authority is deconstructed by the Shunammite's challenge, השאלתי בן מאת אדני הלא אמרתי לא תשלה אתי ("did I ask for a son from my lord? Did I not say, do not give me false hope"). When the woman's words are originally spoken, the reader is inclined to interpret them either as the customary reservations of a mother in an annunciation type scene, or even as a lack of faith in the word of the prophet.[119] Her phrase אל־תכזב is ambiguous, and its meaning could range from a request not to arouse false expectation, to an accusation of lying about performing the miracle. However, by repeating her former objection, using לא תשלה אתי ("do not lead me to hope falsely") as a paraphrase, she demonstrates that it was not disbelief but fear of false hopes created by the apparent blessing of a child. Contrary to some readings of this story, there is nothing to suggest that she does not desire a child;[120] rather, she does not desire a favour from Elisha. She asks nothing from him, neither good nor bad, and therefore does not deserve to be promised good then have it tragically undone.

Again, we remember from the first scene that the Shunammite was neither barren nor weeping in desperation like Hannah in 1 Sam 1. The woman's initial reservation now stands in contrast to Elisha. Although he is the prophet and standing in the place of God, she has more accurate prophetic powers. Elisha has no idea that there could be severe consequences for his miracle, but the woman is more perceptive.[121] The Shunammite's "prophetic" prediction is reminiscent of other examples where biblical characters make a statement that initially does not appear true. As the story progresses, it is proved accurate, often contrary to the

118. Ibid.

119. By analogy with Sarah, who laughs in Gen 18:9–15 and who is accosted by the Lord over it. Note that the birth of Isaac to Sarah bears most similarity to the story of the Shunammite woman. Isaac is also born after an annunciation, almost killed by Abraham at Moriah, then suddenly rescued.

120. E.g. Mary E. Shields, "Subverting a Man of God, Elevating a Woman: Role and Power Reversals in 2 Kings 4," *JSOT* 58 (1993): 67; Danna Nolan Fewell, "The Gift: World Alteration and Obligation in 2 Kings 4:8–37," in *"A Wise and Discerning Mind": Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long* (BJS 325; Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2000), 114–15.

121. Note that the woman is not just wary of the miracle but actually refuses it. Her cry repeating אל, with the vocative in between, is used in only two other places, both in the context of rape (Judg 19:23 and 2 Sam 13:12) (Shields, "Subverting a Man of God," 62), highlighting the violence of her objection.

expectations of the speaker. For example, Abraham reassures Isaac in Gen 22:8 that God will provide a lamb (אלהים יראה־לו השה לעלה בני, "God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering my son"). He presumably thinks that Isaac is the lamb God has provided, but his words are instead fulfilled by the provision of an actual lamb.

The emotion evoked in this scene is intensified by another echo of the annunciation to Hannah. Like Hannah, the Shunammite woman is bitter in soul (v. 27, כי־נפשה מרה־לה; cf. 1 Sam 1:10, מרת נפש), and she is pushed away by Gehazi just as Hannah is thought drunk by Eli.[122] However, the Shunammite is bitter of soul after the annunciation rather than before it, this reversal emphasising the failure of Elisha's miracle.

Thirdly, Gehazi's failure to resurrect the boy with Elisha's staff demotes Elisha from his God-like position where he can send a messenger to do his bidding. The Shunammite woman already recognises Elisha's limitations, and, before v. 31 reports Gehazi failed, the Shunammite vows not to leave Elisha in v. 30. The reader may now recall the Shunammite's behaviour in the annunciation scene when Gehazi conveys messages from Elisha. The Shunammite woman merely states her answers directly to Elisha, not sending messages back via Gehazi. She has long realised that Elisha is "the man of God," not God himself, and that he must perform his miracles directly. The Shunammite's superior understanding is also conveyed by her "grasping" Elisha's feet, where the verb תחזק is used. The use of this verb suggests not submission but persuasion, and it recalls how she previously persuaded Elisha to accept her hospitality in v. 8 (תחזק). She knows that Elisha himself must perform the miracle and that he is capable of doing so. She understands Elisha's prophetic role better than Elisha himself. In what Tadmor and Cogan call "a touch of literary genius and irony,"[123] the woman repeats Elisha's own vow to Elijah from 2 Kgs 2:2, 4, and 6, חי־יהוה וחי־נפשך ("as the Lord lives and as you yourself live"), and it appears to be this "reminder" that persuades Elisha.

In summary, the first scene in this episode tells of Elisha's power to do miracles, but this is partially undermined by its consequences in the second scene. The negative consequences cause the reader to re-evaluate Elisha in the first scene and detect his more subtle limitations there. The plotline is resolved only through his character development and

122. Uriel Simon, "Elisha and the Woman of Shunem: The Miracle Worker Needs Guidance from the Beneficiary of His Miracle," in *Reading Prophetic Narratives* (trans. L. J. Schramm; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 232.

123. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 48.

realisation that he himself must perform the miracle as God's messenger. Then he is able to perform the truly extraordinary miracle of raising a child from the dead. At the same time, the Shunammite woman demonstrates a remarkable knowledge and piety even when placed beside the prophet Elisha.

b. *2 Kings 4:8–37 Read with 2 Kings 2:19–25*

The juxtaposition of 2 Kgs 4:8–37 with 2 Kgs 2:19–25, assuming it occurred within a hypothesised collection of wonder stories, would have created a particularly interesting dialogue about the word of Elisha. We have discussed the corroboration between 2:19–22 and 2:23–25 about the power of Elisha's word to perform miracles. Now in 4:17 the Shunammite gives birth to a son at the time predicted כעת חיה אשר־דבר אליה אלישע ("at the time which Elisha told her"), echoing 2:22, עד היום הזה כדבר אלישע אשר דבר ("until this day, according to the word which he spoke"). Thus the first scene of 4:8–37 corroborates the depiction of Elisha's reliable word. This is overturned in v. 27 when the Shunammite woman comes to Elisha for help and he admits, ויהוה העלים ממני ("the Lord has hidden it from me"). Elisha's communication with God is not flawless, despite the repeated confirmation of it up to this point. Similar to the effect of juxtaposing 2 Kgs 2:19–25 and 2 Kgs 3, the dialogue between the stories suggests that Elisha has power to perform miracles by his word, but his prediction of the future, or in this case even the present, is limited.

We also observed that when 2 Kgs 2:19–22 and 2:23–25 are read together, Elisha first brings life to children (suggested by the reversal of והארץ משכלת, "the land which bereaves"), but he then brings death through his curse of the 42 children. There is a similar opposition of life and death in this story as Elisha brings about the birth of the son, who dies, and then rises back to life. Furthermore, there is a parallel to the episode in 2:23–25 because Elisha uses his great power to perform a miracle (cursing the children and bringing about the birth of the Shunammite's son), and it is certainly against the wishes of the parents involved. Both of these parallels suggest character flaws in Elisha: he reverses the good achieved by his own miracles; and his use of miraculous powers can arouse uneasiness in the audience.

c. *2 Kings 4:8–37 Read with 2 Kings 4:1–7*

The similarities between the episode of the widow's oil and the episode of the Shunammite woman corroborate that Elisha is a powerful miracle worker. After his miraculous provision of oil for the widow in 4:1–7, the reader is in no doubt in 4:8–37 that Elisha warrants the hospitality

offered by the woman of Shunem and that he has the power to deliver the miracle he promises to her.

Another similarity between the stories is that Elisha performs the provision of the oil and the annunciation of a child to the Shunammite woman with little reference to God. However, Sabbato convincingly argues that the turning point in the episode is Elisha's prayer to God. In contrast to Elijah in the widow of Zarephath's story, God is conspicuously absent from the lips of Elisha. The prayer is reported in only three words (ויתפלל אל־יהוה, "and he prayed to the Lord"), but, as the plot hinges on this point in the narrative, they have special emphasis.[124] There is a development in the character of Elisha throughout the story from a misunderstanding about his own role, where he sits in the position of God, to recognition that he himself is the messenger/man of God and must pray to him before his miracle is successful. This meaning is highlighted by the Shunammite's correct understanding throughout the whole story. The Shunammite woman consistently calls Elisha איש האלהים, "the man of God," in vv. 9, 16, and 22, demonstrating that she understands both the divine provenance of his authority and his role as the intermediary. The narrator confirms the reliability of the woman of Shunem's understanding by also referring to Elisha as the man of God in vv. 21, 25, and 27. In contrast to the woman's consistent piety, Elisha does not mention the Lord until v. 27. He then realises that God has not communicated the woman's situation to him (v. 27), and finally, in v. 33, Elisha communicates with God through prayer before the successful miracle. In the course of the story, the Shunammite prompts this character development in Elisha. Not only is she a source of character comparison but also her persistence prompts Elisha to perform the miracle himself, a sign of his humility.[125]

124. Mordechai Sabbato, "The Story of the Shunammite," *Megadim* 15 (1992): 47 (Hebrew). Also Bergen, *Elisha*, 101. Note, it has been suggested that 2 Kgs 4:33b, ויתפלל אל־יהוה ("and he prayed to the Lord"), is a later addition to the story of the Shunammite (e.g. Schmitt, *Elisa*, 93; Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 290).

125. The change that the woman brings about in Elisha has been helpfully highlighted by two feminist readings of this story. They point out that the patriarchy is maintained because ultimately the woman bows before the feet of Elisha because he has proved himself a man of God. However, the story reveals that she is instrumental in this change (see Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, "The Great Woman of Shunem and the Man of God: A Dual Interpretation of 2 Kings 4.8–37," in *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings* [ed. A. Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994], 228–29; Shields, "Subverting a Man of God," 66). The centrality of the Shunammite woman to the reversal is also discussed in Simon, "Elisha and the

Thus a dialogue is created between the first episode in 4:1–7, where a miracle occurs without reference to God, and the second in 4:8–37, where Elisha's deference to him is necessary and is learned throughout the story. The tension—whether miraculous power resides in Elisha or in God—continues in the series of episodes until ch. 5 where finally it is addressed more explicitly.

There are also significant differences between these two episodes, emphasising that the annunciation miracle was not needed. Although the women in both episodes are pious, their situations contrast. In the first episode, the woman has no husband but two children; in the second episode, she has a husband but no sons. In the first, she is poor; in the second, she is rich. In the first episode, the widow appeals to Elisha; in the second, she refuses his help. Elisha instructs the widow in the first episode; in the second, the Shunammite must take matters into her own hands to persuade Elisha to return with her and perform the final miracle.[126] These differences highlight that the widow needed Elisha's help but the Shunammite woman did not. Rather, she was in a position to help Elisha, and she did not expect anything in return. When Elisha does not know the best way to reward the woman, her insistence that she does not want him to speak to the king or commander (v. 13) reinforces that she needs nothing. Moreover, knowing Elisha's supernatural abilities, the reader is surprised that he first offers merely to speak to the king or commander on the woman's behalf in v. 13 rather than offer to perform a miracle. The Shunammite has no apparent needs that Elisha should fulfil miraculously. The miracle he performs on the advice of his servant is therefore even more unnecessary and potentially dangerous, as the Shunammite woman herself warns.

As described earlier, it is uncertain whether the episode of the Moabite war in 3:4–27 or the episode of the widow and the oil in 4:1–7 was placed first in the Elisha cycle. If the episode about the Moabite war had been juxtaposed with the Shunammite episode, Elisha's suggestion that he would speak to the king would have become even more absurd immediately after the failure of his prophecy to the king and his reluctance to help. This absurdity would mock Elisha's efforts to "reward" the Shunammite woman and would foreshadow more clearly the dangerous effects of his misplaced miracle. Moreover, the sacrificing of Mesha's son coupled with the death of 42 children in 2 Kgs 2:23–25 create a

Woman of Shunem," 243–46. Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 29–31, points out that the Shunammite is the dominant actor in the story and that Elisha must undergo development before he is restored to his lofty position as man of God.

126. Cohn, *2 Kings*, 27.

motif of death of children in these stories, making the offer of a child to the Shunammite woman even more ominous.

The placement of Elisha's rescue of the widow and her sons from the creditors provides relief from this motif and distance from Elisha's dealings with the king of Israel. This, in turn, improves the depiction of Elisha in the Shunammite episode.

The critique of Elisha's communication with God, also discerned in the juxtaposition with 2 Kgs 2, is lessened. Instead, the emphasis shifts to the development of his piety in contrast with the Shunammite woman and the parallel Elijah story. The editor allowed texture to remain in the personality and character of Elisha, but doubts about his prophetic authority and power are minimised.

d. *2 Kings 4:8–37 Read with 2 Kings 4:38–41*

Although the story in 2 Kgs 4:38–41 may have been originally connected to 2 Kgs 2:23–25, in its current form the opening statement, ואלישע שב הגלגלה ("and Elisha returned to Gilgal"), implies a chronological succession to the story of the Shunammite woman. This is achieved through continuity of Elisha as the central character and his geographical movement between the two episodes. Elisha's sudden return to Gilgal after the close of the previous episode further reinforces the embarrassing failure of his miracles at Shunem. In contrast to Elijah, who joyously presents the son of the widow at Zarephath after raising him from the dead, Elisha says only two words to the Shunammite, שאי בנך ("take your son"). After this, she simply bows down to him and leaves.[127] Juxtaposed with this abrupt ending, Elisha also leaves and goes to Gilgal in the next episode. Elisha's abruptness at the conclusion of the episode emphasises that the miracle was performed because of his previous failures, not as a triumphant miracle to help the woman.

Furthermore, the chronological continuity invites the expectation that Elisha's character is influenced by the events of the last episode. This is conveyed by parallels between the episodes that diverge at key points to demonstrate the change in his character. First, Elisha is again the cause of the problem in the second episode because he commands his servant (נערו) to make the stew in the first place. The command parallels his instructions to his servant (נערו, v. 12) Gehazi to call the Shunammite woman before the annunciation, the beginning of the tension at Shunem. Secondly, the stew becomes poisoned because it was not known that the gourds were poisonous (בי־לא ידעו), echoing Elisha's ignorance in the

127. Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 31; Simon, "Elisha and the Woman of Shunem," 253.

previous episode. Although the servant is the subject of the verbs in vv. 38–39, suddenly a plural is used for the verb "to know" in v. 39 suggesting Elisha is included. Again Elisha is in ignorance that he is creating a problem by his commands. As a result, the "death in the pot" (מות בסיר) echoes the death of the Shunammite's son, even though the death in the pot does not lead to anyone actually dying. The parallel is strengthened by the sons of the prophets crying out to Elisha about the problem and specifically addressing him as "the man of God" (איש האלהים, v. 40), the title used repeatedly by the Shunammite for the prophet Elisha. However, the parallels diverge when Elisha acts quickly to repair the problem in v. 41. He commands someone to bring flour and throws it into the pot himself (וישלך אל־הסיר).[128] Although Elisha is the cause of the problem in the episode and it requires a miracle to repair it, this time he understands that he himself must act.

Another feature of this episode is that God is not mentioned when Elisha performs the miracle. This is similar to the story about the provision of oil to the widow, where it was also not a concern. Elisha can perform powerful miracles without prayer or reference to God as his authority.

This juxtaposition would probably have taken place at the time the Shunammite episode was added. The Shunammite episode gives depth and complexity to the character of Elisha by portraying him as powerful but flawed, and this representation is enhanced by the juxtaposition. Alongside this, 4:38–41 confirms Elisha's powerful prophetic word, which was also the effect of juxtaposing 4:1–7 with 4:8–37.

9. *2 Kings 4:38–41*

When read independently, the short episode in 2 Kgs 4:38–41 unambiguously exalts the prophet Elisha. The sons of the prophets sit before him, and he provides a meal for them through his unnamed servant. In v. 40, the people call out for help directly to the man of God, and he solves the problem without hesitation, ordering the servant to bring him flour and throwing it into the stew. The end of v. 41 states clearly the effectiveness of Elisha's problem-solving, ולא היה דבר רע בסיר ("and there was nothing bad in the pot"), as a reversal of the people's initial cry מות בסיר ("death in the pot"). Moreover, not only does Elisha make the stew edible but this miracle is a reversal of the initial situation in v. 38, that there was a famine in the land (והרעב בארץ).

128. Compare the LXX, which interprets throwing the flour into the pot as part of the command to the servant. The contrast here is then lost.

Although this scene suggests Elisha is greatly revered by those seated before him, the provision is not particularly miraculous. Read independently, it is not evident that the stew was actually deadly. It has been suggested that the phrase מות בסיר may mean no more than it tasted bitter rather than it would cause death.[129] Indeed, there is no mention that anyone became sick from the stew. Thus the story does not preclude a rationalistic explanation, although its language implies the miraculous. Initially, the provision of food in the time of famine comes through the natural means of scavenging for herbs, rather than a miracle. Then, when a problem occurs, miraculous language is employed. It is similar to the healing of the son of the widow of Zarephath where it is not explicit that the son dies. The author of 1 Kgs 17 perhaps intended to tell only of a miraculous cure but, influenced by the story of the Shunammite woman, has used terms reminiscent of death and resurrection. By analogy, the same process could have occurred here. Under the influence of the terms of life and death in 2 Kgs 2:19–25, the language of מות ("death") has entered the story.[130] The events have been shaped so that they are miraculous and have meaning of life and death. The result is a short story that interprets the events to extol the power of the prophet Elisha.

We have mentioned previously that this episode could have been originally joined to 2 Kgs 2 in the wonder story collection of Elisha. In this context, it completed Elisha's journey back to Gilgal, retracing Elijah's footsteps and legitimising him as prophet in his place. Elisha's provision of food in both this episode and in the next (vv. 42–44) recalls the Elijah cycle and so is easily interpreted as legitimation. Not only is Elisha a miracle worker like Elijah, he is associated with famine like Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1; 18:2) and with the miraculous provision of food (1 Kgs 17:6–7, 8–16; 19:5–8).

One problem with suggesting this earlier interpretation of 2 Kgs 4:38–41 is that it is difficult to claim that the compiler of the collection of stories containing 2 Kgs 2 and 4:38–41 knew of the Elijah cycle in this detail. The appearance of Elijah in 2 Kgs 2 reveals that he was a known figure, but it is uncertain whether the stories now found in the Elijah cycle, in particular the story of the widow of Zarephath, could be the source for an inner-biblical allusion before the Elisha and Elijah cycles came together.

If both Elisha and Elijah stories were circulating among the same group of authors and editors, then the reference to food and famine can be read as a legitimation of Elisha as the successor of Elijah. However,

129. E.g. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 449; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 53.
130. Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 134.

even if these Elijah stories were not known, the reference to the miraculous provision of food can still be considered legitimisation of Elisha's succession, because it parallels the story of Moses, which Elijah is also echoing. The provision of food to the starving Israelites in the desert in Exod 16:1–36 is a focal point in the story of Moses' leadership in Exodus. Furthermore, Exod 16:1–36 is itself juxtaposed with the healing of the waters in Exod 15:22–27, which is echoed in 2 Kgs 2:19–22. Elisha is confirmed as a prophet by his depiction as a second Moses through his miraculous provision of food.

As observed above, this episode has a similar structure to the previous episode in its current context in 4:8–37, and the parallels highlight that Elisha was the cause of the problems which subsequently need solving. Once again Elisha commands a servant to do his work for him. Whereas this episode is unambiguously positive about Elisha when read alone and with 2 Kgs 2, the juxtaposition with 4:8–37 raises the possibility of a negative allusion in the story.

On the other hand, the juxtaposition of vv. 38–41 with both vv. 8–37 and vv. 42–44 reinforces the interpretation that vv. 38–41 are miraculous. The shift from death to life when the Shunammite's son is raised suggests to the reader that the removal of death from the pot in vv. 38–41 is also a miraculous deliverance. Similarly, the miraculous provision of food in vv. 42–44 suggests that the provision of food in vv. 38–41 was miraculous despite the details of the episode not specifically stating this.

10. *2 Kings 4:42–44*

This short episode tells simply of another provision of food. When read alone, there are a number of details missing in the episode itself that readers would normally assume when reading in context. It does not describe precisely for whom the food is provided. There are a hundred men (v. 43), but it does not specify that they are the sons of the prophets. Moreover, it is ambiguous who is performing the miracle. Grammatically, one is inclined to assume that the man from Baal-Shalishah is the subject of the verb ויאמר ("and he said"), commanding the food to be given to the people at the end of v. 42, because he is the subject of the previous verbs. It is only because the food items have been given to the man of God that the reader assumes he is the one giving the order. Indeed, it is not even stated that the man of God is Elisha.[131] This final

131. Cf. Jan A. Wagenaar, "'Someone came from Baal-Shalisha…': The Significance of the Topography in 2 Kgs 4:42–44," *BN* 135 (2007): 35–42, suggests that it was originally a story about an anonymous man of God, and it was incorporated into the Elisha stories by inserting the place name Baal Shalisha, which was near Gilgal.

ambiguity makes the short episode particularly difficult to read in isolation. However, all these ambiguities are clarified if the story is read with the previous episode in vv. 38–41. Read together, it is natural to assume the men are the sons of the prophets and that Elisha is the central character of the story who solves the crisis.

Although it is unlikely the episode was intended to be read alone, the fact that Elisha is not even named highlights the divine source of the miracle. Both the foretelling of the miracle in v. 43 and its fulfilment in v. 44 are attributed to the Lord. This is strengthened by the description of the bread as the first fruits (לחם בכורים), normally an offering to God, and by the reported speech of the Lord. More than any other episode, this story emphasises that God is the source of Elisha's power.

This episode demonstrates further developments in the character of Elisha from the previous two episodes. The episode in vv. 38–41 demonstrated a development from the incidents at Shunem because, after Elisha creates a problem, he realises he needs to address it himself and not delegate to Gehazi. This episode progresses further because Elisha is no longer the cause of the problem. In this episode, Elisha's command to eat in v. 43 is followed by a word from the Lord. No further incident threatens the people, such as poisonous stew in v. 38. Elisha has not only learnt the lesson that he must perform the miracle himself, but he also attends to the word of God directly and explicitly.[132] These episodes alternate between attributing the miracles primarily to God and to Elisha, creating a constant dialogue between these ideas.

Read alone, vv. 42–44 exalt the position of Elisha while simultaneously attributing the miracle to God. The man from Baal-Shalisha shows the prophet respect and honour with a gift of food. This interpretation is enhanced by contrast with Elisha's refusal of a gift from Naaman in the following episode in 2 Kgs 5. The differences between the two situations become apparent. In ch. 5 Naaman offers the gift exclusively to Elisha and does so in response to Elisha performing a miracle for him. By contrast, in vv. 42–44 the gift is not given in return for a favour, only out of respect for the man of God; and Elisha gives the gift to all the people. Thus Elisha's positive image in vv. 42–44 is enhanced because of his correct conduct towards gifts in both episodes.

132. Cohn, *2 Kings*, 34, suggests that this episode "corrects" the previous one because Elisha issues a parallel instruction but now subordinates himself to the word of God.

11. *2 Kings 5:1–27*

We have been working on the premise that there were two main collections of Elisha stories before they were combined with other individual stories in the Elisha cycle. Second Kings 5:1–14 is the first episode in an Aramean collection that we argued probably also contained 6:8–23; 6:24–7:20; 8:7–15, and 13:14–19. Scholars are divided as to whether 2 Kgs 5 should be grouped with these Aramean stories. Second Kings 5:1–14 is a political legend about the king's fear of conflict with Aram and Elisha's intervention in these politics, so it is similar to the other stories of Aramean conflict and Elisha's involvement. On the other hand, vv. 15–27 read as a didactic legend where a foreigner declares his belief in Israel's God and Elisha censures his servant for disobedience.[133] In order to explain this shift of concerns in the story, it has been suggested that vv. 15–19 then vv. 20–27 were later additions,[134] but there are many other scholars who argue for the unity of the chapter.[135]

Due to the lack of anything approaching consensus on this issue, we will consider a third suggestion, that vv. 15–27 was a single later addition to the story. It was designed to link the Aramean collection to the wonder story collection by incorporating Gehazi and the sons of the prophets. Verse 14 provides a satisfactory conclusion to a self-contained narrative that was expanded by the editor when combining the two collections of stories.

Arguments against vv. 15–27 being a later addition are applicable against arguments that vv. 15–19 and vv. 20–27 accrued separately, but they do not counter the proposition that vv. 15–27 were added in one

133. Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 126–31. DeVries, *Prophet Against Prophet*, 117–23, groups this story instead with the other Gehazi legends because of his appearance in vv. 20–27. However, DeVries himself agrees that the story has been expanded (albeit twice rather than once), and, if only vv. 1–14 are considered, the story belongs naturally with the other Aramean stories because of the Aramean conflict and political affairs. DeVries dates the Gehazi expansion to earlier than the Aramean collection, preventing this association. However, we argue that the Gehazi expansion occurred when these collections were joined together, so his presence in the story is evidence that the expansion was influenced by the other Gehazi stories, not that they belonged in a collection together.

134. Argued, for example, by Schmitt, *Elisa*, 78, and Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 298–303. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 456, and Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, 261, suggest only vv. 20–27 are a later expansion.

135. E.g. Montgomery, *Book of Kings*, 373–76; DeVries, *Prophet Against Prophet*, 54; Stipp, *Elischa*, 300–19; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 68; and Long, *2 Kings*, 68.

single editorial expansion. Long[136] says that unity is suggested by the rounding effect of מצרע ("leprosy") appearing at both the beginning and end of the story, however this could reflect the skill of the editor who expanded the story. Long also points out that there is repetition of חי־יהוה ("as the Lord lives") in vv. 16 and 20, and also ויפצר־בו ("and he urged him") in vv. 16 and 23. This implies unity in vv. 15–27 and, in the case of ויפצר־בו, a rounding effect in the expansion. Thus it is evidence for our own argument that vv. 15–27 were a unified addition. He also argues that v. 19b would not conclude a self-contained narrative, which would again only be a problem if there were two accretions rather than one. Finally, Long argues that there is no reason for Naaman to bring clothes and treasures in v. 5 without the expansion in vv. 15–27. However, the bringing of gifts with a request for prophetic help is a common motif in the book of Kings and usually does not reappear in the story.[137] Thus it is credible that 2 Kgs 5:1–14 originally stood in the Aramean collection without vv. 15–27. The king's fear of the Aramean king, the renown of the prophet Elisha, and his intervention in political matters correspond to the themes of the other stories.

This implies that at an earlier stage 2 Kgs 5:1–14 was juxtaposed with 6:8–23. Later it was expanded with 5:15–27 and juxtaposed with 4:42–44 and 6:1–7. It is not certain that this was the process by which 2 Kgs 5 entered the Elisha cycle. However, it fits the evidence before us, and it is worth working with this hypothesis to demonstrate some of the different ways that this episode may have been interpreted in former contexts.

Although we have argued that it was written in two parts, this episode can nevertheless be divided into three "scenes"—vv. 1–14, vv. 15–19, and vv. 20–27 in its final form. Each scene closes with some resolution of the dramatic tension before the plot is reopened in the following scene.[138] Like the story of the Shunammite woman, juxtaposed scenes within an episode reinterpret one another even though they are now part of a single episode. The scenes describe chronologically successive events, encouraging the reader to reevaluate each one in light of its causes and consequences. The first two scenes focus on Naaman[139] and the final scene on Gehazi.[140] This marks a change from the previous

136. Long, *2 Kings*, 68.

137. E.g. 1 Kgs 14:3 and 2 Kgs 8:8–9.

138. Robert L. Cohn, "Form and Perspective in 2 Kings 5," *VT* 33 (1983): 172.

139. Contrary to ibid., 168, 171–72, who reads the first episode as focusing on Elisha.

140. R. D. Moore, *God Saves: Lessons from the Elisha Stories* (JSOTSup 95; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 80.

episodes where Elisha has dominated the action and dialogue. Although he no longer holds centre stage, his presence looms in the background, and throughout each scene he remains an important character. The episode examines the nature, role, and evaluation of the prophet but does so from the perspective of first Naaman and then Gehazi.

a. *2 Kings 5:1–27 Read Independently*

(1) *Scene 1: vv. 1–14*. The most straightforward reading of this chapter as an independent episode is that it emphasises the power of the prophet Elisha. It demonstrates his power to perform miracles and the need for Naaman to humble himself before Elisha in order to be healed. Elisha also undergoes a transformation in the story and is humbled before God. This message is much more subtle because each scene simultaneously develops and emphasises his abilities and fame as a prophet. In the first scene, a young Israelite girl speaks of the power of Elisha to Naaman's wife. The message is quickly carried upwards in v. 4 when Naaman, a powerful and respected man, tells the king and so readily accepts the authority of the young girl.[141] The king of Israel's despair in v. 7 demonstrates that the king of Aram and Naaman are making an impossible request, preparing the way for Elisha to show Naaman that there is a prophet in Israel.

The significant number of reversals within this first scene emphasise Elisha's power. The most obvious is the restoration of Naaman's skin from being leprous. He is not only healed but also made clean. טהר ("clean") is repeated four times in vv. 10–14 alongside the instruction to dip himself seven times in the Jordan. This is reminiscent of the instructions for purifying a leper in Lev 14:7, where the priest sprinkles the cured leper seven times to pronounce him clean (טהר).[142] Furthermore, the miracle is confirmed as the work of Elisha by repeating the words from his prediction in v. 10 (וישב בשרך לך וטהר, "your flesh will be restored to you and you will be clean") in its fulfilment in v. 14 (וישב בשרו כבשר נער קטן ויטהר, "and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young lad and he was clean"). The extra words added to the fulfilment כבשר נער קטן ("like the flesh of a small child") are also a reversal of

141. Note it is omitted that Naaman's wife told Naaman before he told the king. This makes the elevation of Elisha's reputation even more rapid. The LXX has καὶ εἰσῆλθεν καὶ ἀπήγγειλεν. The use of the feminine possessive pronoun, "her lord," suggests that it is Naaman's wife who approaches the king not Naaman himself.

142. Note that the unusual use of the verb טבל to describe Naaman bathing himself also recalls the regulations for purity in Lev 14:6 (Yair Zakovitch, *"Every High Official Has a Higher One Set Over Him": A Literary Analysis of 2 Kings 5* [Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1985 (Hebrew)], 69–70).

Naaman's initial epithet, איש גדול ("a great man"). This contributes to the theme that Naaman, a great man from Aram, is humbled before Elisha in Israel. The process is begun by Naaman being told about the prophet by a נערה קטנה ("a small girl") from Israel, a contrast through play on words.[143] Then Elisha leaves him standing at the doorway and sends a messenger to him in v. 9, despite his coming in great military fanfare with his horses and chariots. Although Naaman is willing to endure this discourtesy, he is unimpressed by Elisha's lack of grandeur in performing the miracle. Ultimately, he listens to his servants in v. 13, submitting to a servant for the second time, and by extension he now submits to the instructions of Elisha. This submission of a great foreign man exalts the status of Elisha.

(2) *Scene 1 read with 2 Kings 6:8–23*. When 5:1–14 is read with 6:8–23 in the Aramean collection, there are many parallels between the stories that highlight their common message. In each, Elisha works with the king of Israel to help him solve his problem, albeit with criticism or belittling of the king in 5:7 and 6:22. He brings about dramatic reversals for the Arameans that leads to their submission before him. Naaman follows his instructions and is healed in the Jordan; and the Arameans are blinded and find themselves at Elisha's mercy in the centre of Samaria. Both the stories display generosity towards the Arameans when Naaman is healed and the Aramean army is released in 6:23. These parallels emphasise the message in 5:1–14 that the Arameans are made submissive before the great man Elisha, who in turn helps, but also dominates, the king of Israel.

Another effect of this juxtaposition is that there is an association between the "bands of Arameans" who have captured the Israelite servant girl in 5:2 (וארם יצאו גדודים, "and Aram went out in bands") and the cessation of raids by the bands (גדודי ארם, "the bands of Aram") in 6:23. This draws attention to the conflict between Israel and Aram that brought about the capture of the young girl in ch. 5. Although Naaman visits Israel in peace, there is unresolved conflict in the background. The conflict is also suggested by the king's extreme reaction to the letter from the king of Aram. He is convinced that it is an aggressive act (כי־מתאנה הוא לי, "for he is seeking an opportunity to quarrel with me") and that their lives are in danger because it is impossible to meet the request. The foregrounding of this conflict makes the episode in 5:1–14 more similar to the other Aramean stories, which all feature either Aramean aggression

143. Observed by many commentators, e.g., Long, *2 Kings*, 72; Moore, *God Saves*, 73.

or threat. As we will see, the extension to the story in 5:15–27, and the insertion of 6:1–7, shifted this emphasis from Elisha's role in politics and conflict to other theological concerns.

(3) *Scenes 2 and 3: vv. 15–19 and vv. 20–27*. We resume our reading of 5:1–27, now looking at the scenes in vv. 15–19 and vv. 20–27. Each successive scene reinterprets the previous one because it reveals the consequences of the earlier events. The consequences are initiated in v. 15 by repeating the verb וישב ("and he returned") from vv. 10 and 14 (where it described the restoration of Naaman's flesh) to express Naaman returning to the man of God (וישב אל־איש האלהים, "and he returned to the man of God"). The turning of his flesh now results in the turning of Naaman to the man of God and ultimately towards Israel's God.

Naaman returns, stands before Elisha (ויעמד לפניו), using a phrase repeated throughout the story to express submission,[144] and offers gifts to him. Although these actions express submission to Elisha, his words express submission to God when he makes the remarkable declaration that there are no other gods apart from the God in Israel. It is difficult to see how this is a logical conclusion from the miraculous healing because the healing itself does not suggest exclusivity to Israel's God. Perhaps it answers his own rhetorical question in v. 12, הלא טוב אבנה [אמנה] ופרפר נהרות דמשק מכל מימי ישראל הלא־ארחץ בהם וטהרתי ("are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers in Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?"). He has realised only the waters of Israel could heal him because Israel's God is the only true god. The lack of complete logic to this declaration highlights the change in direction of the meaning in the story. Although Elisha summoned Naaman so that he would know there is a prophet in Israel (וידע כי יש נביא בישראל), he has gone a step further and had a theological revela-

144. On the usage of לפני, see, e.g., Zakovitch, *Every High Official*, 54; and Moore, *God Saves*, 72–73. This complex system of humility and submission in the story is expressed by the repetition of the three words לפני, עבד and אדני: Naaman to the King of Aram (לפני אדניו, v. 1; לאדניו, v. 4; אדני, v. 18; עבדי, v. 6); the Israelite slave girl to Naaman's wife (לפני, v. 2; אדני, v. 3 of Naaman); the King of Israel to the king of Aram; Naaman's servants to Naaman (עבדיו, v. 13); Gehazi to Elisha (אדני, v. 22; אדניו and עבדך, v. 25); and of course Naaman to Elisha (לפני and עבדך, v. 15; עבדך, vv. 17 [×2], v. 18 [×2]). Note also that the phrase is specifically avoided when a character is not demonstrating submission, for example, when Naaman first visits Elisha and he is made to wait at the doorway (v. 9), and when Gehazi appears before Elisha after he has taken the gift from Naaman in v. 25. In the latter example, the preposition אל is used in place of לפני, which, according to Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 67, is rare and can express antagonism (e.g. 1 Sam 17:51).

tion, that there is no god except in Israel. Naaman's understanding of the theological ramifications is demonstrated by his attention to the minute details of obtaining soil from Israel for use in worship[145] and asking forgiveness for the ongoing necessity to enter the temple of Rimmon. He has changed from mocking Israel's waters to asking for two mule-loads of Israel's soil.[146] Thus the first scene is reinterpreted from merely affirming Israel's prophet, to being a witness to the superiority of Israel's God.

On the other hand, Elisha's own greatness is affirmed alongside that of the God of Israel. This is ensured by Elisha's statement חי־יהוה אשר־עמדתי לפניו ("as the Lord lives before whom I stand"). Exalting the god exalts the prophet who stands before him. Finally, Elisha's refusal of a gift reinforces his earlier declaration that he was performing the miracle so that Naaman would know there is a prophet in Israel (v. 8). There can be no accusations of a mercenary motive.

The final scene reinterprets the preceding scenes by shifting to a drama surrounding Elisha's servant Gehazi. It compares both Elisha and Naaman, and Gehazi and Naaman. Unlike Naaman, who reconsiders his decision on the advice of his servants, Elisha does not accept advice from Gehazi that he should take a gift from Naaman. Elisha does not need to submit to his servant, and the contrast with Naaman further exalts him in the eyes of the reader. His explanation to Gehazi in v. 26, העת לקחת ("is this the time to take…?"), emphasises that the purpose of the miracle is for the recognition of a prophet and God in Israel, not for profit.[147]

145. It has been suggested that the soil was required because foreign soil was considered unclean (Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, 260, citing Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 301; and Amos 7:17 and Hos 9:3). Within the story, the request is appropriate for Naaman's declaration that there is a god only in Israel—it is therefore logical that he would want to take some of Israel's land with him so that he can continue to worship the god.

146. Cohn, "Form and Perspective," 168.

147. It is unclear precisely what Elisha means by "is this the time?" and, indeed, it is omitted in the LXX (replacing העת with καὶ νῦν, "and now"), followed in the Vulgate. However, the MT reading is supported by 6QKgs, Targum Jonathan and the Syriac versions. "Is this the time?," with the implied answer "no," suggests that there is in fact a time to receive gifts (e.g. the previous episode), but this is not it (David P. O'Brien, "'Is This the Time to Accept…?' [2 Kings V 26b]: Simply Moralizing [LXX] or an Ominous Foreboding of Yahweh's Rejection of Israel [MT]," *VT* 46 [1996]: 452). Reading the episode independently, the most likely explanation for the problem with Gehazi's timing is that the purpose of the miracle was to show that there was a prophet in Israel, not for financial gain.

Furthermore, Gehazi is contrasted to Naaman. Whereas Naaman is generous and wishes to give Elisha a gift, Gehazi is greedy and wishes to take a gift. Naaman is healed of leprosy, but Gehazi and his descendants will have leprosy forever. This introduces a new theme into the story: that a foreigner can be more pious than Elisha's own servant. This is at variance with the other Aramean stories, which emphasise the Arameans as the enemies. It is more similar to the Shunammite story, where the woman, also an outsider, is more astute than Elisha himself. Here Elisha is undoubtedly powerful and irreproachable, and performs two more miracles than in the Shunammite story: supernatural knowledge of what Gehazi has done; and giving him leprosy. Nevertheless, the story is no longer just about the superiority of Israel's God or prophet, or the resulting conversion of a foreigner, it is a critique of an Israelite.

b. *2 Kings 5 Read with 2 Kings 4:42–44 and 2 Kings 6:1–10*

The stories surrounding 2 Kgs 5 are of the same ilk as the final scene in vv. 20–27: an insight into the circle of Elisha rather than international political affairs. This shifts the emphasis from the Aramean conflict in ch. 5 to a character study of Elisha, Naaman, and Gehazi, and an appreciation of Elisha's miraculous powers beyond his intervention in Israel's politics.

Both of the surrounding episodes depict the situation of the sons of the prophets as impoverished. In 4:42–44 the famine from 4:38 is presumably still afflicting the land, and Elisha must perform a miracle to feed a large number of people with only a small amount of food. In 6:1–7, although there is not a deficiency in food, there is a lack of space for all the sons of the prophets. This suggests that there are a large number of people in their group, stretching their resources. Moreover, this is reinforced by the man's despair about the borrowed axe. Not only did he need to borrow one in the first place, but he was evidently also too poor to obtain a new one when he lost the borrowed one. The relative poverty and need of the sons of the prophets creates a sharp contrast with the wealth of Naaman and the extensive list of gifts he brings to Israel in 5:5. This background information adds greater depth to our reading of ch. 5 in isolation, answering questions left open by the episode.

An interpretation is now given for Gehazi's outrage that Elisha does not accept a gift from Naaman. Gehazi's motivation is not given explicitly, and most commentators assume that he pursues Naaman because of greed.[148] Although he hides his loot in the Ophel in 5:24 and keeps it

148. Most notably Gray, *I & II Kings*, 508, suggests that the purpose of the story is to explain Gehazi's name, supposedly meaning "avaricious."

secret from Elisha, it is not conclusive that he intends to keep the wealth for himself. Furthermore, his oath in 5:20, חי־יהוה ("as the Lord lives"), is incongruous with an intention to commit a robbery.[149] Added to this, if he was consumed with greed, presumably he would have found a way of asking for all the gifts Naaman had brought rather than settling for two changes of clothing and two talents of silver.[150] This suggests that Gehazi believed he was doing the right action, even if it went against the decision of Elisha and required deceiving Naaman. On the other hand, the list of items Elisha enumerates in v. 26 implies that Elisha believes it was greed. The inclusion of ועבדים ושפחות ('servants and maidservants") in the list implies that Gehazi, himself a servant, wants to command other servants, demonstrating greed and desire to use the money for himself. In conclusion, the motivation of Gehazi is left open to the reader because there are indications in multiple directions.

The two surrounding stories imply that Gehazi's motivation for accepting the gift was the neediness of the sons of the prophets. They were reliant on gifts of food from strangers and could not even afford to buy their own axes.[151] Even a small portion from Naaman's gifts would have helped alleviate the plight of the prophets. Furthermore, Elisha had no qualms about accepting a gift in the previous episode from the man from Baal-Shalishah, and so it probably seemed incomprehensible to Gehazi that Elisha would suddenly refuse. This situation encourages the reader to sympathise more with Gehazi's pursuit of Naaman, even if his insubordination of Elisha and his extortion of Naaman are judged negatively.

These circumstances add to our interpretation of Gehazi's sin and the reason why Elisha was angry with him. As noted above, it is implied that Elisha did not want to take gifts because the purpose of his miracle was the exaltation of God and his prophet, and it was not "the time" to gain a profit. Following from this, Gehazi's sin was primarily that he did not submit to the wish of Elisha. This is highlighted because of the contrast to Naaman, whose humility is a major theme of the episode. Naaman is healed from leprosy because of his humility, and Gehazi is afflicted with

149. O'Brien, "'Is This the Time to Accept…?'," 450.

150. As observed in Zakovitch, *Every High Official*, 105, there is already great cunning in Gehazi's request to Naaman. He speaks of two sons of the prophets and asks for two changes of clothes but only one talent of silver, as if expecting Naaman to insist upon him taking the second.

151. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 66, also observes that Elisha's refusal is remarkable in a time of famine.

leprosy because of his lack of humility when he disobeys Elisha. This reading is reinforced by other stories in the biblical narrative where characters are punished for insubordination. One salient parallel is Num 12 where Miriam is also מצרעת כשלג ("leprous like snow," 12:10). Numbers 12:1 makes clear that Miriam and Aaron's criticism of Moses was valid and that he was indeed guilty of their accusation. Miriam's sin is rather that she speaks against God's servant and is insubordinate to him (12:8), regardless of the rightness or wrongness of what she says. By analogy, Gehazi's insubordination to Elisha is the primary cause for his punishment in the episode.[152]

The situation in the surrounding episodes offers a further dimension to Gehazi's sin and Elisha's anger. They suggest that Gehazi does not trust that Elisha, and thus God, would provide for their needs even in famine and poverty. Gehazi is more severely condemned by the surrounding episodes because they emphasise that Elisha does indeed offer provisions for their needs. When there is not enough food, he provides more, and, when there is a crisis over a borrowed axe, he is able to solve it. Gehazi is looking for outside help when he ought to be trusting in the power of God through Elisha for provisions. Considering the frequent demonstrations of miraculous provision in the surrounding episodes, this lack of faith is highly reprehensible.

Although 6:8–23 is not immediately juxtaposed with ch. 5, nor is it likely to have ever been juxtaposed with vv. 15–27, it is separated only by the short incident of the floating axe-head, and so the influence of its interpretation is not entirely lost. The two consecutive accounts of wars in 6:8–23 and 6:24–7:20 highlight the state of conflict, and this in turn brings allusions to this conflict in ch. 5 to the fore: the Aramean conflict is alluded to by the slave girl who was captured from Israel; and the Israelite king's reaction to the Aramean letter suggests his fear of Aramean aggression. Thus Elisha's reproach, "is this the time?" (v. 26, העת) takes on an additional meaning.

"The time" that Elisha refers to is not only the time that he is performing a miracle but the time of Aramean conflict. Gehazi refers specifically to Naaman's nationality in 5:20 when he announces his intention to pursue him (חשך אדני את־נעמן הארמי הזה, "my lord has spared Naaman, this Aramean"). Gehazi sees an opportunity for regaining from an Aramean the prosperity that has been lost through the Aramean conflict. When Elisha enumerates the list of items that Gehazi has in fact *not*

152. Zakovitch, *Every High Official*, 105, 118–19; O'Brien, "'Is This the Time to Accept…?'," 451.

taken from Naaman (5:26),[153] he describes a wealth characteristic of peacetime.[154] In particular, he lists שפחות ("maidservants"), referring back to the Israelite servant girl in possession of the Arameans. Thus Elisha pronounces that it is not right to regain this wealth by exploiting Naaman's conversion but rather through trusting in God's power through his prophet. This trust is justified by the episodes in 6:8–23 and 6:24–7:20.

Moreover, this interpretation gives greater meaning to the opening statement in 5:1 that God had given salvation (תשועה) to Aram through Naaman. God brings salvation for nations, including Israel, and Gehazi must wait for this salvation through the miracles of Elisha and not through deceit and exploitation of Naaman. Although the expansion in vv. 15–27, and the juxtaposition with the domestic stories in 4:42–44 and 6:1–7, shifts the emphasis onto Elisha and his circle, the question of the Aramean conflict remains in the story and interacts with the depiction of Elisha and Gehazi's responses to it.

c. *The Characterisation of Elisha*

When the episode is read independently, the prophet Elisha is primarily extolled as a powerful miracle worker, and there is minimal complex characterisation of him. First Naaman and then Gehazi are at the forefront of the action as each character develops. At the beginning of the episode, rumours of Elisha's powers have reached Aram, and, at the end of the story, these rumours have been justified by his three miracles.

However, there is a more subtle development in the character of Elisha that is visible when ch. 5 is read after the four episodes in ch. 4. We have already observed the alternation between miracles performed by Elisha without reference to God (4:1–7, 38–41) and those where he prays or relays the word of God (4:8–37, 42–44). This theme is examined most explicitly in the story of the Shunammite woman. Elisha's first miracle is misguided and, when he tries to correct it through his servant Gehazi, he also fails. The situation is turned around only when he prays. Nevertheless, a dialogue of contradiction is created with the immediately

153. Note that the LXX resolves the incongruity that Gehazi only received silver and the clothing with καὶ λήμψῃ ἐν αὐτῷ ("and shall you receive by him"), inserted before the list of gardens, olive orchards, and so on. This implies that Gehazi might receive these things in the future (using the talents of silver) but confirms he has not received them yet.

154. O'Brien, "'Is This the Time to Accept…?'," 449–57. He reads the episode in the context of the whole Deuteronomistic History and argues that "it is not the time" refers to it not being the time for God's blessing on Israel because of their sin.

surrounding episodes, where Elisha performs miracles without reference to God and without any mishap. The prophet is powerful but ultimately his power does come from God.

Furthermore, there are a remarkable number of parallels, repeated words, and repeated ideas between the episodes about Naaman and the Shunammite woman suggesting a similarity in meaning. The woman of Shunem is described as אשה גדולה ("a great woman," 4:8), and Naaman is described as איש גדול ("a great man," 5:1). Both stories feature the servant Gehazi, and the miracles are performed at the prompting of servants. In the story of the Shunammite woman, Gehazi's advice to Elisha, that the Shunammite woman had no children, is the impetus for the first miracle. The Shunammite's declaration, that she will not leave Elisha, is the impetus for the second. The woman calls Elisha אדני ("my lord") in 4:28, putting herself in the position of a servant. Similarly, the words of servants are the stimulus for the miracles in ch. 5. The Israelite servant girl informs Naaman about the miracle worker Elisha in 5:3, and Naaman is persuaded to follow the instructions of the prophet by his servants in 5:13. Another cross-reference between the episodes occurs when the king of Israel declares in 5:8 האלהים אני להמית ולהחיות ("am I God that I kill and bring to life?"). This recalls that Elisha has indeed done both of these things—he brings death in 2:23–25, and, of relevance here, he brings the Shunammite's son back to life. There is a parallel in the way the woman stands at the doorway before Elisha in 4:15 (ותעמד בפתח, "and she stood at the doorway") and Elisha relays messages to her through Gehazi; and 5:9–10 when Naaman also stands at a doorway (ויעמד פתח־הבית, "and he stood at the doorway of the house") and receives a messenger from Elisha. In both episodes, the Shunammite and Naaman express doubt about the miracle announced by the prophet Elisha. In 4:35 the Shunammite's son sneezes seven times as the miracle takes place, and in 5:14 Naaman dips himself in the Jordan seven times when he is healed. In both episodes, there is a scene where a character hurries in pursuit, first the Shunammite woman to Elisha, and then Gehazi to Naaman; and in both stories they meet their target with the word of greeting שלום before pursuing their true agenda.

These links between the episodes draw attention to the otherwise barely perceptible progression of Elisha's character in ch. 5. When reading ch. 5 independently, our attention is directed to the submission of Naaman to Elisha and to Gehazi's insubordination. Alongside this, Elisha learns submission to God throughout the course of the episode. There is not a dramatic miscalculation in his miracle, as in his annunciation to the Shunammite woman, but nevertheless there is an overthrow

of his attitude. He begins by sending word to the king of Israel that he will perform the miracle so that Naaman would know there is a prophet in Israel (v. 6; וידע כי יש נביא בישראל). Curiously Naaman already knows this because the slave girl has told him. Elisha is not to know this from the story and so may be forgiven for his self-aggrandisement. However, the inappropriateness of his intention is confirmed in 5:15 when, after Naaman is healed, he makes a declaration: not that there is a prophet in Israel as Elisha intended, but that there is a God only in Israel. Elisha is implicitly rebuked, leading to his own oath regarding his rejection of the gift in v. 16, חי־יהוה אשר־עמדתי לפניו ("as the Lord lives before whom I stand"). This echoes Naaman's submission before Elisha in the previous verse (ויעמד לפניו, "and he stood before him"), forming a parallel between the submission of Naaman to Elisha and the submission of Elisha to God. Elisha's refusal to receive a gift emphasises that he does not see anything owing to him, because he is subordinate to God. God receives due worship both by Elisha's declaration that he stands before him and by Naaman's request for soil and forgiveness for entering the house of Rimmon.

We have seen above that Naaman's outburst in v. 11, הנה אמרתי אלי יצא יצוא ועמד וקרא בשם־יהוה אלהיו ("behold, I said to myself, surely he would go out and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God"), indicates his lack of humility before Elisha, which is rectified before he is healed. His words can also be taken at their face value, and the reader may express the same surprise: why did Elisha not call upon the name of his God? In particular, Naaman's use of עמד ("to stand") recalls the phrase ויעמד לפניו discussed above, associated with the submission of both Naaman and Elisha. This is the first use of the divine name by anyone apart from the narrator in v. 1, and it highlights that Elisha has not even referred to the Lord, let alone called upon him as he performed his miracle.

Furthermore, Elisha's treatment of Naaman before his outburst is reminiscent of his treatment of the Shunammite woman. Like the Shunammite, Naaman is made to stand at the doorway while Elisha sends a messenger. Thus Elisha has an intermediary rather than seeing himself as the intermediary sent by God. In the second meeting between Elisha and Naaman, they meet face-to-face, coinciding with Elisha's declaration that he stands before the Lord and therefore recognises himself as the intermediary.

Indeed, Elisha's sending an intermediary to Naaman provokes the whole chain of arrogance and humility in the episode. Elisha begins with self-aggrandisement in v. 8 when he wants to show Naaman that there is

a prophet in Israel, rather than show that there is a God. In conjunction with this, he does not meet Naaman when he arrives at his doorway. This leads to Naaman's arrogance when he is offended at Elisha's treatment of him, despite Naaman having arrived with an impressive array of horses and chariots. Naaman then learns submission to the instructions of Elisha, and his return to Elisha prompts Elisha's own submission to God. Elisha's character development forms a ring around that of Naaman in a chiastic structure, and the two are interconnected. The pride of Elisha prompts the pride of Naaman, and then the humility of Naaman prompts the humility of Elisha.[155]

Although this episode contributes to the theme of Elisha's indeterminate role as intermediary or as the source of the miracles, it adds to the tension rather than resolves it. Elisha learns throughout the episode that he stands before God, and he is implicitly criticised through Naaman's anger for not calling on his God before performing the miracle himself. Regardless, his miracle is successful even without submission to God. There is never any doubt that Elisha's power comes from God as the narrator uses the title איש האלהים ("the man of God") to describe Elisha repeatedly throughout the episode, especially in v. 14 when Naaman is healed. There seems to be a dichotomy between his objective power as a man of God and his own personal character development, between his understanding of his position before God and the source of his power.

12. *2 Kings 6:1–7*

After the international events in the previous episode, the narrative shifts to a domestic scene featuring Elisha and the sons of the prophets, probably originating from the wonder story collection containing 2 Kgs 2–4. As the next episode in 6:8–23 will return to stories from the Aramean collection, it is surprising that this short episode has been inserted between them. It has been suggested that it was positioned here because it features the Jordan River in common with ch. 5 and because it continues the pattern of a longer episode followed by one or two shorter ones.[156] Another suggestion is that it forms a bridge between an episode of peace with the Arameans in 2 Kgs 5 and war in 2 Kgs 6:8–23.[157] The uncertainty about how it fits in the context, alongside the puzzling details

155. Zakovitch, *Every High Official*, 54.

156. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 70; Cohn, *2 Kings*, 43.

157. Šanda, *Könige. II*, 88. However, as I have argued, there is in fact conflict in ch. 5.

of the story, has led to relatively little comment on the story.[158] By interspersing this episode from the wonder stories among the Aramean stories, the themes of the two collections are integrated. Their different perspectives and ideologies of Elisha enter dialogue with one another.

a. *2 Kings 6:1–7 Read Independently*

When read independently, this episode is evidently extolling the prophet Elisha albeit through an unusual series of events. The dramatic tension of the story, the lost axe, does not enter the episode until v. 5. It is preceded by lengthy background information for which it is difficult to see why it is either interesting or necessary. While overall the prophet is extolled, there are details in the story that undermine this message, and they ask more questions than they provide answers.

The initial scene, where the sons of the prophets are sitting before Elisha in v. 1 (ישבים שם לפניך), dignifies him as their master from whom they draw teaching and authority.[159] However, the ensuing events show that, although the sons of the prophets are devoted to Elisha, he is an inattentive leader to them. He appears oblivious to the problems in their living conditions, and therefore they must devise their own plan for relocation and rebuilding a structure. Nevertheless, they remain respectful and ask his permission in v. 2 before relocating. Implicit in their request is that Elisha will accompany them. They describe their current situation as המקום אשר אנחנו ישבים שם לפניך ("the place where we dwell before you there") and repeat a very similar construction in their description of their relocation to the Jordan, מקום לשבת שם ("a place to dwell there"). Although the verb ישב primarily means "to dwell" when

158. As pointed out in Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 70. This commentary then proceeds to make minimal comment on the story!

159. Compare the translations of המקום אשר אנחנו ישבים שם לפניך in Gray, *I & II Kings*, 459, "the place where we are dwelling before thee," and in Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 69, "the place where we meet with you." The second, more formalised meaning suggested by Cogan and Tadmor is supported by other occurrences of the verb ישבים followed by לפני. The phrase is also used of Elisha and the sons of the prophets in 2 Kgs 4:38 where either meaning would fit the context. However, outside of these occurrences in the Elisha stories, these words are used together to describe worshippers before God (Judg 20:26; 21:2; 2 Sam 7:18//1 Chr 17:18; Isa 23:18; Ps 61:8); it is used to describe elders before the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 8:1; 14:1; 20:1; 33:31); and in Zech 3:8 people sit before the high priest Joshua. These all imply sitting before a leader to learn from their authoritative words, a meaning made more explicit in Ezek 33:31 where וישבו לפניך עמי ("they sit before you") is followed by ושמעו את־דבריך ואותם לא יעשו ("and they hear your words but they do not do them").

not coupled with לפני, the proximity to the words in v. 1 implies the meaning that they will sit before the prophet in learning. This also applies in v. 2, where the words שם and מקום are repeated. Furthermore, if their primary occupation were sitting before the prophet (and there is no indication that it was otherwise), it would surely be obvious that they wished him to accompany them when they moved to a more spacious location. Elisha does not understand this, and, although there is ambiguity in the first person plural נלכה־נא, Elisha does not interpret it as including himself, only the sons of the prophets. Instead of replying with another first person plural verb he uses an imperative, לכו ("go").

Moreover, after the sons of the prophets request permission to move in unison, only one member from their group asks Elisha to join them (ויאמר האחד, v. 3), as if they are too intimidated to challenge the announcement of the prophet. He asks very politely (הואל נא ולך את־עבדיך, "please come with your servants"), referring to the men as "your servants" (עבדיך) to indicate his respect for Elisha. Elisha now understands and agrees to go with them. Elisha's importance is preserved throughout, although the reader wonders at the strange misunderstanding between Elisha and the sons of the prophets.

The elaborate plan by the sons of the prophets to move nearby the Jordan and to cut down one beam each has struck commentators as inefficient and peculiar.[160] It proves relevant to the plot however because the felling of trees by the Jordan creates the situation where there is a sunken axe-head. Furthermore, the unusual plan whereby each member of the group cuts down one beam explains why one of the men was using a borrowed axe. They understandably did not have enough axes for all of them. Nevertheless, despite this background information, it is difficult for the reader (perhaps especially a modern reader) to feel the urgency and crisis of a lost axe-head. The man's cry of deep distress in v. 5 (אהה) seems melodramatic for the situation.[161] The background information explains only the situation, not the reactions of the characters.

Finally, Elisha performs the miracle by cutting a stick and throwing it into the water. The narrator reminds the reader at the crucial moment in v. 6 that Elisha is a איש־האלהים ("the man of God"), and thus the source

160. E.g. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 76, argues that close to the Jordan was not a good place to find building materials, although, as pointed out in Gray, *I & II Kings*, 459, and proved by the story, there were trees there. Bergen, *Elisha*, 126, argues that it was an unusual way to divide labour and, moreover, would surely not produce enough beams, even for the frame of the building.

161. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 460, calls the sons of the prophets' lack of initiative "practical ineptitude."

of the power is undoubtedly from God. Nevertheless, it is an impressive display on behalf of Elisha and glorifies him as prophet. The man who has lost his axe cries out immediately to Elisha, knowing that he has power to perform the miracle. Elisha does not hesitate to perform the miracle, although he needs further information from the man as to the axe's whereabouts. Finally, when he issues instructions to take up the axe in v. 7, the man obeys.

Although the miracle is performed effectively, it is questionable whether it is necessary. Elisha's use of a stick is probably mimetic magic where the axe-head floats just as the stick does.[162] Yet there is irony that Elisha cuts a stick to retrieve the axe. Although a different verb is used for Elisha's action, the same word for trees/sticks is used in vv. 4 and 6 (ויגזרו העצים, v. 4; ויקצב־עץ, v. 6), causing the reader to hesitate over the seriousness of the crisis. There is a subtle irony that Elisha can obtain an עץ without the aid of the axe, although the context suggests that Elisha's stick was smaller than a beam used to build a house. The building project is not endangered in any way, and the man's obligation to the owner of the axe is the sole reason he needs to retrieve it.

Furthermore, it is unclear why the man could not retrieve the axe using more natural methods. Before Elisha throws in the stick, he asks the man where the axe-head fell, and the man is able to indicate the location. The axe has only sunk, it is not lost. Moreover, after it floats, the man merely reaches out his hand and takes the axe-head, suggesting that it was not very far away. Perhaps part of the miracle was that it floated closer to the shore,[163] but this is not stated explicitly, leaving the reader with the impression that the axe-head could probably have been retrieved without the aid of the prophet's miraculous powers.[164] On the one hand, the triviality of the miracle increases the depiction of Elisha as a powerful prophet. As one commentator has said, performing miracles is as common as building houses.[165] On the other hand, these details

162. Cf. 2 Kgs 8:14–19, where Elisha also uses imitative magic. As Joash only fires three arrows, he will only have victory against the Arameans three times. The story of the bad-tasting stew in 4:38–41 may also be such an example—because the flour is not bitter, the stew is now no longer bitter.

163. The verb צוף usually means to cause to flow or to overflow (cf. Deut 11:4; Sir 39:22; 47:14; see also the Semitic cognates and *HALOT*). Thus it is likely that the verb means not only "to float" but also "to flow in the water" towards the man.

164. See, for example, the rational explanation given in Gray, *I & II Kings*, 460, that Elisha used the stick to find the axe-head in the riverbed. Although this is not what the story wishes to imply happened, it does present an obvious solution for how the man could have retrieved the axe-head himself.

165. Long, *2 Kings*, 80.

conceivably satirise the relevance of the prophetic role and question the usefulness of his prophetic power.

The strange method of building dwellings, the man's melodrama, and the possibility that he could have retrieved the axe-head himself, depicts the sons of the prophets as bordering on incompetence. Some commentators have read this as the dependence of the sons of the prophets on Elisha.[166] This reading is contradicted by the circumstance that they devise the scheme to relieve their crowded situation without any input from Elisha. He does not even understand their implicit request for him to join them there. Read alone, these details sit awkwardly in the story and give it an overall sense of an unusual and powerful miracle, but one that does not actually mean anything. It could have easily been told in one sentence, "Elisha was able to make an iron axe-head float," as the background information provides neither great significance nor dramatic tension when read in isolation.

b. *2 Kings 6:1–7 Read with 2 Kings 5:1–27 and 2 Kings 6:8–23*

When 6:1–7 is read in juxtaposition with 2 Kings 5 and 2 Kgs 6:8–23, many of these unusual features gain a context and therefore a meaning. It is interesting that this is the case because 2 Kgs 6:1–7 previously belonged to the wonder story collection and would probably have been juxtaposed to 4:42–44. We will therefore examine whether this former context could also have clarified the unusual features of this short story.

The episodes in 2 Kgs 5 and 2 Kgs 6:8–23 demonstrate that Elisha had a number of concerns apart from the sons of the prophets, including the politics of the Israelite and Aramean kings. Thus the special request by the sons of the prophets that Elisha accompanies them to their new location is a result of his itinerant nature and reflects the norm that he does not reside with them. It is a special honour for Elisha to accompany them when he has other important business to attend to. This explanation increases the prestige of Elisha as a prophet in Israel.

The same explanation would have been provided if this story was originally juxtaposed with 4:42–44 in an earlier collection of Elisha's wonder stories. The sons of the prophets appear in 4:38–41, and Elisha helps them find food. The famine creates special circumstances for him to help them, and it is not evident that he remained constantly in their company. Then in 4:42–44 Elisha again provides food. Now he only says to give it to the "people" (תן לעם), suggesting they may not be the sons of the prophets from the previous story. Furthermore, in the previous

166. E.g. Bergen, *Elisha*, 127.

episodes in 2 Kgs 2 and 4, in the wonder story collection, Elisha is associated with different groups of sons of the prophets in Bethel and Jericho. In the Shunammite story, he is alone on a journey with his servant Gehazi. Elisha is itinerant and not connected with a specific group of sons of the prophets. Thus, if the story is read within this collection of stories, it is not assumed he will go with the sons of the prophets to the Jordan.

In addition, 2 Kgs 5 and 2 Kgs 6:8–23 exclude the interpretation that Elisha is oblivious to the needs of the sons of the prophets. His supernatural sight, both of the actions of Gehazi and into the bedroom of the king of Aram, makes it implausible that he would be blind to any implied request from the sons of the prophets that he accompany them. Instead, we again conclude that Elisha was itinerant and it was a special honour that he accompany the sons of the prophets.

Similarly, the context of many other types of miracles provides a reason why such an unusual and almost trivial miracle has been included. Elisha's miraculous powers are not limited to one particular sphere, such as healing or second-sight. They extend to all aspects of life, death, and nature, including being able to challenge the natural laws governing the flotation properties of iron. Furthermore, in the story's new position between 2 Kgs 5 and 6:8–23, which concern international political events, it is touching that Elisha is concerned with the problems of a single son of the prophets and his lost axe-head. In particular, he performs the miracle in person at the Jordan in contrast to sending Naaman unaccompanied for his healing.

Not only does 2 Kgs 5 provide understanding to these details of the plot, it also increases the literary effectiveness of the background information given at such great length in the episode. The previous miracles of Elisha leave the audience in expectation of another extraordinary miracle. This tension is increased by the reference to the Jordan in the beginning of v. 2 (הירדן), recalling the healing of Naaman there in ch. 5. Suspense is also created when there is a question about whether Elisha will accompany the sons of the prophets, as his continued presence in the story is essential to any miracles taking place. When he agrees to accompany them, the expectation is raised even higher until finally the nature of the miracle is revealed in v. 5 when the axe is lost. Similarly, the cry of the man who has lost his axe ceases to be melodramatic and instead can be read as a formulaic request to the prophet. In each of the previous episodes, including in the story of Naaman, there is a direct request to the prophet before he performs his miracle. The suspense created by the background information in the episode would apply if it was juxtaposed

with any of the other miracle stories of Elisha, although it is particularly enhanced in juxtaposition with another miracle taking place at the Jordan.

From a thematic point of view, 6:1–7 enters a dialogue of corroboration with the episode in ch. 5 by presenting an ideal contrast to the actions of Gehazi. The key words indicating the theme of submission and hierarchy from the previous episode all reappear in this chapter: לפניך in v. 1 to describe the sons of the prophets sitting before Elisha; עבדיך in v. 3 when one of the sons of the prophets asks Elisha if he will accompany them; and אדני in v. 5 when the man cries out to Elisha that he has lost his axe. Thus the sons of the prophets are depicted in full submission to the prophet Elisha, in contrast to Gehazi who undermines Elisha's decision and lies to him about it. The parallel is enhanced by the key word לקח ("to take"), which appears ten times throughout ch. 5 to describe Naaman taking the gift with him to Israel, his urging Elisha to take the gift and Elisha refusing, and finally Gehazi taking it. In the episode in 6:1–7, the verb appears as the very last word in v. 7 (ויקחהו) to describe the man taking the axe from the water. Unlike Gehazi, who took illegitimately after Elisha performed a miracle, this man takes according to Elisha's instructions.

Although the sons of the prophets apparently propose an illogical plan, and the man who lost his axe-head lacks initiative, these details portray the sons of the prophets as perfectly submissive to Elisha. They ask for Elisha's permission before moving in v. 2 (נלכה־נא, "please let us go"), waiting for Elisha's reply לכו ("go"), even though there is no assumption that he will come with them. Now, rather than Elisha misunderstanding their request, the sons of the prophets express their obsequiousness. They do not need his permission to move because he is not their permanent leader. They request his permission anyway as an expression of their submission. The sons of the prophets represent the ideal submissive Israelites before Elisha and reinforce the transgression of Gehazi in the previous episode.

13. *2 Kings 6:8–23*

Verses 8–10 establish the central tension of this episode: the king of Aram is warring against Israel. Although the warnings of Elisha to the king of Israel prevent the attacks, they are nevertheless attempted many times. This is conveyed by the ambiguity of פלני אלמני ('somewhere or other") in v. 8, suggesting the dramatisation of a repeated event, and by the report in v. 10 that the king of Israel was pre-warned several times (לא אחת ולא שתים). It is not explicitly stated that Elisha was able to warn

the Israelite king every time the king of Aram's camp moved, so it is possible that there were successful raids by Aram. However, the frustration of the king of Aram in v. 11 indicates that Elisha's interference was sufficient to lessen these attacks considerably. The constant threat of the Aramean army creates a dramatic tension, but, for the present, the threat is averted by the prophetic powers of Elisha.

The episode opens with the introduction of this dramatic tension, and it duly closes with a statement of its resolution in v. 23, ולא־יספו עוד גדודי ארם לבוא בארץ ישראל ("and the bands of Arameans did not continue to come to the land of Israel"). The intervening narrative addresses a different tension—the king of Aram's frustration with Elisha and his attempt to capture him. It is the genius of the prophet Elisha in this story that he uses the second threat to resolve the first threat. He does this through a series of surprising actions, each of which puzzles the reader because it does not necessarily flow logically on to his next move. However, ultimately Elisha manoeuvres the situation so that he and Israel are no longer bothered by the Arameans.

The reader is initially surprised that Elisha is apparently taken unawares in vv. 14–15 and that his servant must inform him the city is surrounded. Elisha's power of divining the location of the Arameans is demonstrated in v. 9, and it is confirmed, even enhanced, by the words of an Aramean servant. Elisha knows not only the king's words to his servants but also what he speaks in his bedroom (v. 12). This claim is never substantiated in the story, but it leaves a powerful impression with the reader. It is then surprising that Elisha has not guarded the city of Dothan from the Aramean army or himself escaped from there. In v. 15 he has evidently not said anything to his servant, and the reader takes the servant's point of view, wondering how Elisha was caught unawares.[167] This first surprise is then overcome in v. 16 when Elisha tells the servant that they outnumber the Arameans. Elisha has guarded the city after all.

At this point, a second enigma is introduced in the story. Elisha prays that the servant's eyes are opened, and he sees the horses and chariots of fire. In the remaining story these horses and chariots do not feature again, and, for this reason, vv. 15b–17 are considered by many to be a later addition to the story.[168] However, although the horses and chariots do not

167. Encouraged by the use of הנה in v. 17, which switches to a new perspective.

168. Hentschel, *2 Könige*, 28, and Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, 264, believe vv. 15b–17 to be a later addition and that originally the man of God was the subject of v. 15a. Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 63, believes only v. 17 is the later addition based on the *Wiederaufname* in v. 17 and v. 18. Schmitt, *Elisa*, 101, considers all of vv. 15b–18,

explicitly reappear in the story, they are an important connecting device, and it is by no means certain that these verses are secondary.[169]

The horses and chariots contribute to the meaning of the passage in a number of ways.[170] Their appearance here confirms the miraculous power of the prophet Elisha, which has not yet been stated explicitly in the story. Although his designations as "the man of God" (איש האלהים) in v. 9 and 10 and "the prophet" (הנביא) in v. 12 imply that he is gaining his information about the king of Aram's counsel via supernatural means, the idea that he has his own spies in Aram is not eliminated completely. The vision of the horses and chariots demonstrates that Elisha can do more than just predict the whereabouts of the Aramean king—he has a fiery army at his command. Furthermore, the connection to 2 Kgs 2, where the chariots of fire accompany Elijah to heaven, reinforces their divine origin. The impressive display provides a convincing answer to the servant's (and reader's) fears that Elisha has been taken unawares by the appearance of the Aramean army.

Furthermore, the horses and chariots of fire are integrated into the story because they are a response to the appearance of the horses and chariots of the Arameans in v. 14 (which is not generally considered secondary). They create a link in the story between the concept of physical human warfare and the supernatural warfare Elisha will use to lure the Arameans into Samaria. The chariotry of the Arameans is matched by Elisha's chariotry with the additional heavenly qualities of invisibility and fire. The idea of fighting a physical battle with supernatural means, represented by the supernatural army, is also suggested by the use of the verb "to smite" in the phrase ויכם בסנורים ("and he

20 as part of a later redaction excluding the phrase וירדו אליו. Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 306–7, considers all the supernatural elements in the story to be secondary, including vv. 15–17 and also vv. 10, 14, 18, 20, 23.

169. However, if it is secondary, which we will show is improbable, it would have been inserted when the episode was still part of the Aramean collection, so for our purposes we read the episode in its current form. Schmitt, *Elisa*, 101, and Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 63, argue the insertion was not dependent on 2 Kgs 2:11 but rather stemmed from a similar conception of prophets as the might of Israel. Furthermore, this supernatural, heavenly element is not out of place in the Aramean stories because it is also found in 2 Kgs 7:6. As it is neither dependent on the later story nor unusual in the Aramean stories, we do not have any basis on which to consider it later for the purposes of our readings.

170. For more detail on the integration of these verses in this story, see Rachelle Gilmour, "A Note on the Horses and Chariots of Fire at Dothan," *ZAW* 125 (2013): 308–13.

smote them with *sanwerim*," v. 18). The *sanwerim* are used in place of a physical weapon.[171] This idea is further reinforced in vv. 21–22, where the root נכה ("to smite") is repeated. As will be discussed shortly, Elisha warns the king against "smiting" the captive Arameans because they were not captured with his sword and his bow. Instead of the king's physical weapons, a supernatural weapon has been used, namely the *sanwerim*.

Indeed, it is possible that the horses and chariots of fire are the direct means by which Elisha strikes the Arameans with *sanwerim*. This word is often translated as "blindness."[172] This translation can be defended on the basis of the Akkadian *sinlurma*, also spelt *sinuri*, meaning "blindness."[173] However, the *sanwerim* were the means by which the Aramean's confusion occurred, not necessarily the confusion or blindness itself. Furthermore, commentators have argued that the Arameans were not actually blind; rather, their sight was distorted because they followed Elisha unaware that there was a problem.[174] Based on a different etymology from an Akkadian loan word *shunwurim*, Cogan and Tadmor translate it as "blinding light."[175] Another alternative is that it is based on the root נור, similar to Jewish Aramaic סנור, meaning to dazzle or blind, and this etymology also suggests a blinding light.[176] In this case, the

171. Note that the verb נכה ("to smite") can also be used of diseases (e.g. 1 Sam 5:6), plagues (e.g. Num 14:12), or blindness (e.g. Deut 28:28), as well as physical weapons. However, in each of these examples the sickness is used as an instrument of judgment from God, thus supporting our reading here.

172. The LXX translates it as ἀορασίᾳ, "not seeing." See also Gray, *I & II Kings*, 465.

173. Marten Stol, "Blindness and Night-Blindness in Akkadian," *JNES* 45 (1986): 296.

174. Argued by Anton Jirku, *Von Jerusalem nach Ugarit: Gesammelte Schriften* (Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1966), 234, and followed by Robert LaBarbera, "The Man of War and the Man of God: Social Satire in 2 Kings 6:8–7:20," *CBQ* 46 (1984): 642–44. They wonder why the Arameans persisted on their journey to find Elisha and did not seem aware of the blindness. This also occurs in Gen 19, when the men of Sodom persist in searching for the door even though presumably they would have realised they would be powerless when they found it if they were completely blind. However, considering all the other miraculous events and strange behaviour in both of these episodes, this is not reason enough to reject the interpretation that they are blind. See also Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18–50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 37.

175. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 74; see also C. F. Burney, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903), 286.

176. *HALOT*.

sanwerim is a bright light, which causes some kind of distortion of the Arameans" sight. Thus a possible implication is that the fire from the horses and chariots is the cause of this bright light.[177]

As LaBarbera points out, the phrase וירדו אליו ("and they went down to him") in v. 18 is usually thought to have the Arameans as its subject, but it is likewise possible that the horses and chariots of fire "came down." They are the last mentioned noun phrase, and they were on the hills surrounding Dothan, thus necessitating them to come down to Elisha. By contrast, the Arameans were surrounding the city and so were more likely in the valley surrounding the tel.[178] Thus they would go up, not down. Elisha prays to God immediately after the heavenly army, the instrument of God in 2 Kgs 2, comes down in readiness. This implies that it was the heavenly army that then acted. However, rather than using the supernatural horses and chariots of fire for conventional warfare, either the fire functions as a bright light to confuse the Arameans or the army brings blindness by some other means.

Even if this link cannot be verified, these verses make a further contribution to the interpretation of the episode through their play on "seeing." First, the concept of "seeing" arches the entire episode. The opening of the Arameans' eyes to see Elisha in Samaria is a play on the king of Aram's instructions in v. 13, לכו וראו איכה הוא ("go and see where he is"). This command is to some degree fulfilled by the information that Elisha is at Dothan but is later ironically fulfilled when the army sees him in Samaria. This wordplay is developed further in vv. 15–17. Although the horses and chariots may only questionably contribute to the remaining plot, surprisingly Elisha's ability to open the eyes of his servants is integral to it. Indeed, this is a startling reversal of the reader's expectations. When Elisha opens the eyes of his servants to see the horses and chariots, we expect this supernatural army to be the element Elisha is relying upon to rescue them, and the reason for Elisha to say confidently, "do not fear" (v. 16, אל־תירא). To some extent, this is fulfilled by the association between fire, light, and *sanwerim*. However, there is a twist in the story because Elisha's ability to open the eyes of the servant and affect his sight will also be important to the ensuing plot.

177. Cf. Jirku, *Von Jerusalem nach Ugarit*, 240, 244, makes a similar suggestion that the word סנורים is the plural of סנור, which he speculates was originally the name of a demon. In this case he says that the סנורים are the horses and chariots that Elisha enables his servant to see.

178. LaBarbera, "The Man of War," 642.

The parallel between Elisha's interaction with his servant and the Arameans is established by the repetition of him praying to God to open their eyes followed by the report that it happened (vv. 17, 20). In particular, the repetition of פקח and עין reinforce this. The parallel is not exact because, when the servant's eyes are opened, he goes from seeing the world as everyone else sees it to seeing the world as Elisha sees it. The result of opening the Arameans' eyes is that they now see the world as everyone else sees it. However, this inexact parallel is accommodated in the narrative by using a similar formula when Elisha prays that the Arameans would be struck with *sanwerim* in v. 18. This creates a pattern of Elisha changing the sight of those around him.

Our understanding of the pericope is complicated by commentators' uncertainty whether the Arameans become blind or merely confused by some type of distorted reality. If they are blind, then Elisha is physically opening their eyes, but, if their sight is somehow distorted, then the verb פקח has a metaphorical sense of showing them reality. In any event, his opening the eyes of the servant uses the verb in yet a different way, of opening his eyes to a spiritual reality. Thus there is a word-play on פקח where its meaning is reinterpreted in the course of the story;[179] but the repetition of the same verb establishes the essential similarity between what Elisha is doing to the servant and to the Arameans.

Whether or not vv. 15–17 are a later addition, the opening of the servant's eyes is now an important part of the theme of "seeing" in the episode. It is integrated into a pattern of Elisha having the power to change people's sight and using supernatural means to fight a physical enemy. In the process of making this link between conventional and supernatural warfare, the verses play with the reader's expectation about opening the eyes of the servant to see the horses and chariots of fire. We assume that the horses and chariots will be Elisha's weapon against the

179. The verb פקח ("to open") is nearly always used of eyes, or it contextually refers to seeing (with exceptions: in Isa 42:20, it is used of ears; in Isa 61:1, it is used in the phrase פקח־קוח to mean "freedom"). All three of the meanings possible in this context can be found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. It is used as a contrast to blindness in Exod 4:11 and Isa 35:5, supporting an understanding that Elisha could be restoring their sight after being afflicted by blindness. Secondly, in Gen 21:19 it is used when God reveals to Hagar a well of water. She was not previously blind but somehow reality was distorted. Note also in this story that Hagar's eyes being opened is linked with her not fearing (Gen 21:17), like the servant of Elisha in 2 Kgs 6:15–17. Finally, it is used in Gen 3:5, 7 to describe Adam and Eve becoming aware of good and evil, and of their nakedness, and it indicates the opening of eyes to a spiritual reality like Elisha's servant.

Arameans, and they are possibly the source of the bright light. However, in a clever twist, Elisha's ability to open the eyes of the servant is also an important weapon. He has the power to affect people's sight and control what they can see. This will be how he leads the Arameans into Samaria and sends them away such that the marauding bands do not return.

Once the Arameans are captured in Samaria, we expect them to be defeated once and for all, but yet another expectation is overturned.[180] This expectation is voiced by the king of Israel who asks in v. 21, האכה אכה אבי ('shall I kill, shall I kill, my father?"). Elisha replies with a surprising rhetorical question, לא תכה אשר שבית בחרבך ובקשתך אתה מכה (NRSV: "No! Did you capture with your sword and your bow those whom you want to kill?"); and then he commands that the king put bread and water before them. Commentators are divided about the precise intent of this rhetorical question. Some interpret the question as "would you kill someone you captured with your sword and your bow?," implying that the king would not normally kill someone he had captured in war, and therefore he should not kill these captives either.[181] On the other hand, it can be interpreted as "did *you* capture them with your sword and with your bow that you would kill them?," implying that it would be acceptable to kill them if they had been captured by the king himself, except this was not the case.[182] An argument made for the former solution is that it was not customary to kill captives (e.g. 2 Sam 12:30–31) unless it was holy war (e.g. Ahab is censured for not killing a prisoner in 1 Kgs 20:42 but here it is related to חרם). Rather, it was more normal to keep them as slaves.[183] However, even if it was not normal to kill captives, it was still the right of the captor to do so (e.g. 2 Sam 8:20, where both occur). Although this argument allows for the first interpretation, it does not exclude the possibility of the second.

Furthermore, the grammar of the question inclines towards the second interpretation. The subordinate clause אשר שבית בחרבך ובקשתך is placed first in the sentence so that the interrogative particle is placed on this aspect of the question, not on אתה מכה. Thus, more likely, it is the question, "did you capture...?" rather than "would you kill?" Furthermore, the repetition of the second person masculine suffix on "sword" and

180. Also expected by Long, *2 Kings*, 87.

181. E.g. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 70; and tentatively in Long, *2 Kings*, 87.

182. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 72; Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, 264; Cohn, *2 Kings*, 47. A third suggestion in Gray, *I & II Kings*, 463, is to follow the insertion in the Greek of a negative particle, "Wouldst thou strike down him whom thou hast not taken with thy sword or thy bow?" This effectively implies the same meaning as the second interpretation.

183. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 78, who references various ancient Near East sources.

"bow" emphasises that the king's own sword and bow is referred to. Elisha is not talking about a general principle of whether you would kill prisoners if you captured them with weapons, but rather pointing out that they were not captured with the *king's* sword and bow, "*your* sword and *your* bow," or indeed any sword and bow, and so he has no right to kill them.

Although this second interpretation is most natural, the ambiguity allows the other layer of meaning to be implied. It is not only that the king himself did not capture the men and has no right to kill them, but more so, Elisha, the captor, did not use a sword or bow either. There is double the reason not to take their lives.

Elisha's response of mercy to the Arameans is further indicated by his command that they are given bread and water in v. 22 (לחם ומים). The giving of bread and water commonly accompanies a display of mercy to an enemy and therefore is a motif expressing this cultural custom. It appears in 2 Chr 28:8–15, when the Israelites capture other Israelites during the time of Ahaz but release them with food because of the prophetic word of Oded; and in Jer 40:1–5 the Babylonian chief releases Jeremiah with an allowance of food. There is evidence that this motif is grounded in cultural convention from elsewhere in the ancient Near East. For example, one Hittite text, *KUB XIV* 2.ii 63–64, reads: "The guarantee in the Hatti land is such: if we give bread and drink to somebody, then we do not harm him in any way."[184] Similarly in *A Letter of Ashurbanipal* ABL 1260.5–12, "From the beginning I have rendered favours to Elam, but they have not returned my favours. I protected their refugees from kings to noblemen, gave them bread and water and sent them (back) to their country."[185] Thus, by Elisha telling the king to give them bread and water, he is commanding the demonstration of mercy, accompanied by this cultural custom.

184. Taken from Mario Liverani, *Myth and Politics in Ancient Near Eastern Historiography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 14. The Adapa myth, which Liverani uses this text to explain, also illustrates this cultural convention to some degree. Adapa was warned about the dangers of eating with Anu, but Anu was impressed by Adapa's wisdom and decided not to poison him. However, because he refuses to eat Anu's food, Anu wants to kill Adapa after all.

185. Taken from Simo Parpola, "Desperately Trying to Talk Sense: A Letter of Assurbanipal Concerning His Brother Šamaš-šumu-ukin," in *From the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea: Studies on the History of Assyria and Babylonia in Honour of A. K. Grayson* (ed. G. Frame; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2004), 233. I thank Dr Ronnie Goldstein of the Hebrew University for directing me to these examples in his article, "The Provision of Food to the Aramaean Captives in II Reg 6,22-23," *ZAW* (forthcoming).

When the actual giving of food is reported in v. 23, a different wording is used, ויכרה להם כרה גדולה (NRSV: "so he prepared for them a great feast"). Many commentators therefore read Elisha's whole reaction to the capture of the Arameans as an excessive act of generosity through a lavish feast.[186] He is overcoming evil with kindness. This is based on the translation of the *hapax legomenon* in v. 23, כרה, as "feast" based on the Akkadian *kirêtu* as a possible cognate.[187] However, Elisha initially only suggests giving them bread and water, according to the customary motif, and so the lavish feast is a strange, unexplained crescendo of this act of mercy. It might make sense if it intended a characterisation of the king as an unstable personality, who shifts from wanting to kill the men to setting before them food more lavish than the bread and water Elisha suggested. However, it is unclear who the subject of v. 23 is: Elisha, the king, or their servants. Thus it does not function convincingly as characterisation of the king and instead is incongruent with the story. An alternative translation of this is therefore preferable, such as the etymology of כרה from Akkadian *karû* yielding the translation, "he heaped for them a big pile."[188] Verse 23 simply reports the completion of Elisha's orders for the large number of people rather than implying the lavishness of a feast. The central point here is that they show mercy according to the custom of war, not that they smother the Arameans in kindness.

We note also that Elisha's act of mercy further integrates vv. 15b–17 into the episode because these verses foreshadow Elisha's non-military means of victory against the Arameans. Despite the capabilities of the heavenly army at Elisha's disposal, he only strikes them with *sanwerim* in v. 18. His replacement of violence with mercy is begun from the midpoint in the episode.

Verse 23 then describes the cessation of Aramean raids but gives no explanation as to why this is a result of Elisha's mercy towards them. This is a gap left for the reader to fill. The effectiveness of mercy to turn away hostilities recalls both 1 Sam 24 and 26, where David spares Saul and Saul ceases from pursuing him. However, the reason for the cessation of Aramean incursions may also be a realisation that they are powerless against Elisha. It is curious that the king of Aram thinks he can capture the prophet Elisha even though Elisha can preempt all his movements. Finally the king of Aram has realised this futility. The

186. As Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 78, writes, he is "embarrassing his foes with kindness."

187. See, e.g., Gray, *I & II Kings*, 465; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 74.

188. Proposed in Goldstein, "Provision of Food." Cf. Aramaic כריא; Mishnaic Hebrew כרי.

Aramean king was blind because he thought he could capture the great prophet Elisha, but his eyes have been opened to the impossibility. The compounding of Elisha's great miracles is finally sufficient to convince the Arameans that he is more powerful than they are. Indeed, perhaps this is Elisha's plan. If he did not spare the lives of the Aramean men, there would be no one to tell the story of his ability to distort their perception and lure them into Samaria, and the power of his miracles would be lost on them.

Throughout this episode, the king of Israel treats Elisha with great respect. He defers to Elisha in v. 21, asking him if he should kill the prisoners and addressing him as אבי ("my father"). In v. 23 Elisha's commands are obeyed without any objection from the king. This also occurs in vv. 9–10, where the king of Israel repeatedly follows Elisha's instructions without question. Although the king's desire to kill the Arameans is misplaced, throughout the episode he is consistently respectful and obedient towards Elisha, resulting in an overall positive evaluation of him in partnership with Elisha.

a. *2 Kings 6:8–23 Read with 2 Kings 6:1–7*

Although 2 Kgs 6:8–23 and 6:1–7 are very different stories and probably from different collections, they enter into dialogue with one another. First, there is corroboration. In each of them, Elisha performs a miracle and he arouses great respect in his followers. This theme is heightened in 6:8–23 because even the king of Israel obeys Elisha's instructions, not just the sons of the prophets.

Secondly, there is contradiction between the stories. In 6:1–7 Elisha has no supernatural knowledge, despite the extraordinary ability to make the axe float. He needs to ask in v. 6 where it fell in order to perform his miracle. On the other hand, supernatural knowledge is the core feature of Elisha's powers in 6:8–23, echoing the scene in 5:20–27 where he knows of Gehazi's subterfuge. Again, Elisha's powers are heightened from one episode to the next.

b. *2 Kings 6:8–23 Read with 2 Kings 6:24–7.20*

The episode in 2 Kgs 6:24–7:20 begins with the time designation ויהי אחרי־כן ("it happened after this"), which serves to indicate that it should be interpreted chronologically after the previous episode. Despite this connecting phrase, it is likely that the two pericopes were originally independent stories that were placed next to each other in the Elisha cycle. While there are thematic and even verbal links between the pericopes, the plot does not suggest that the stories were always one continuous narrative. In light of the original independence of these traditions,

commentators have suggested either that the time designation is a redactional connection or that it originally connected the story to other material.[189] However, there is no evidence that there was earlier material replaced by the story in 6:8–23; and the plot of 6:24–7:20 does not require anything previous to it, but is a self-contained story without the initial time designation. More likely the time designation indicates an intention by the editor to influence our interpretation of 6:8–23 with respect to its chronological consequences in 6:24–7:20.

By introducing 2 Kgs 6:24 with a chronological marker, a dialogue of contradiction is created between these two stories. The first story ends with the cessation of Aramean incursions (6:23, ולא־יספו עוד גדודי ארם לבוא בארץ ישראל, "and the bands of Aramaens did not continue to come into the land of Israel"), and this is placed in direct contiguity with the statement that the king of Aram is besieging Samaria (6:24, ויקבץ בן־הדד מלך־ארם את־כל־מחנהו ויעל ויצר על־שמרון, "and Ben-Hadad, King of Aram, gathered all his camp and went up and besieged Samaria"). The contradiction is emphasised by the accompanying inversion of a plot element: at the end of 6:8–23, the Arameans are enclosed by Samaria, and, at the beginning of 6:24–7:20, Samaria is enclosed by the Arameans. The contradiction can be (and has been) harmonised, for example, by noting the subtle variation that v. 23 refers only to גדודי ארם ("marauding bands of Aram") ceasing. In contrast, v. 24 reports the whole army of Arameans, led by their king, conducting the siege.[190] However, even if the stories can be reconciled, the harmonisation necessarily changes the meaning of the episodes. It requires 6:9–23 to be read in a different way to its natural meaning when read independently. When the first episode is read alone, v. 23 suggests a grand victory for Israel and more particularly Elisha. It is a resolution to the initial problem of v. 8 that the king of Aram was warring against Israel. It is also justification for Elisha's mercy towards the Aramean captives in Samaria when the king wanted to kill them. Now this ending is not a triumphant success but an introduction to an even greater problem. It

189. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 470.

190. Josephus' interpretation in *Ant.* 9.4.4 is that the Syrians have now decided to make open war against Israel instead of sending raiding parties (this solution is also offered in Bergen, *Elisha*, 135). A different solution was offered by Radak (2 Kgs 6:23), who reinterprets עוד to refer only to a fixed period, not to mean "forever." This is essentially the harmonisation by LaBarbera, "Man of War," 646. He suggests that there is a long period of time implied between the stories. The problem with this solution in the final form is that both battles read as though they took place during the reign of Jehoram, who, according to 2 Kgs 3:1, reigned only twelve years; thus, the period of time cannot be that great.

sounds positive for a moment, only to be reinterpreted as the provocation for a full-scale attack by the Arameans.

Bergen suggests that the credibility of Elisha collapses as a result of this sequel.[191] This extreme evaluation of Elisha is unnecessary because he never promises that the incursions will cease, instead giving a moral argument for the king to spare the captives. Furthermore, in the final form, the chariots and horses that Elisha says will protect them are ultimately responsible for the flight of the Arameans, so his miracle is incomplete rather than a failure. However, Bergen is correct that our evaluation of Elisha is now less impressive because his miracle was not as immediately effective as the conclusion of the previous episode suggested.

On the other hand, the depiction of Elisha's miraculous power is enlarged by this juxtaposition. In 6:24–7:20 there is an emphasis on Elisha's ability to predict the future within Israel rather than performing the miracle himself. He knows that the messenger will come to his house with a mandate to kill him, and he successfully foretells both the end of the siege and the death of the doubting official. The fulfilment of the death of the official is given particular attention in vv. 17–20, where it says twice that he died and also repeats the details of Elisha's prediction. The emphasis on fulfilment increases our perception of this aspect of Elisha's miraculous power. It complements the depiction of his supernatural sight of the horses and chariots in the previous episode and demonstrates that he can "see" both into the future and in the present.

A final thematic link between the pericopes, which affects our interpretation of 6:8–23, is that of feast and famine. When read independently, the feeding of the Arameans with bread and water before they were released is a normal way of expressing mercy to a captured enemy. However, food features so prominently in the next passage that feeding the enemy takes on added significance. The extreme famine in Samaria caused by Arameans contrasts with feeding the Arameans. The Arameans ate bread and water, but the Samarians cannot even buy a donkey's head or dove's dung,[192] instead eating their own children. This reversal gives

191. Bergen, *Elisha*, 134–36.

192. Commentators have suggested that these items, particularly doves' dung, referred to carob pods or some other type of grain or husks (see the overview in Gray, *I & II Kings*, 470–71; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 79; Israel Eph'al, *The City Besieged: Siege and Its Manifestations in the Ancient Near East* [CHANE 36; Leiden: Brill, 2009], 60–61 n. 67). Nevertheless, the two items were chosen for how unappealing they sound, particularly in contrast to the flour and barley in 7:1, even if they did denote something else as well. Indeed, as Eph'al points out, carob pods

cause to question Elisha's reasoning for sparing the Arameans and places the king's suggestion to kill them in a better light. They could have saved their food, even if killing them would not have prevented the further attack.

14. *2 Kings 6:24–7:20*

This story has a complex plot initiated by the dramatic tension that Ben-Hadad is besieging Samaria. Then it is quickly revealed that Ben-Hadad is the catalyst to a more destructive enemy: famine.[193] Within the context of the famine caused by the siege, the plot is structured around four different responses to the crisis: the woman who eats her child, the king stricken by grief, Elisha who gives an oracle, and the four lepers who take their lives into their own hands. These are supplemented by two other reactions that are less central to the structure of the episode: the elders awaiting a word from Elisha and the doubting commander. In the despair and frenzy of a famine during a siege, these reactions bring realism to the story in a portrayal that is more detailed and atmospheric than typical biblical narrative. The descriptive realism is established from the beginning by the report of the inflation of prices. The price of a donkey's head and dove's dung simultaneously convey the impersonal economic reality of the siege and an almost humorous, but highly pitiable, extreme of what people are being forced to eat.[194] By examining the four main reactions to the famine, we will see that the story does not make them the subject of moral evaluation in any clear way. Contrasts between the main characters and the commander or the elders add ambiguity to the portrayal. The four reactions are used to prompt plot movement[195] culminating in deliverance by God. They reflect the human desperation of the situation that is ultimately a part of divine deliverance.

were also considered animal food and only eaten by humans in time of hardship, as would be suggested by their unappealing nickname.

193. First Kings 20 begins with an almost identical scenario, but instead the "conflict" is the early negotiations between kings. Our episode displays a similar structure to 2 Kgs 3:4–23, where the tension in the plot begins with an offensive against the Moabites but soon develops into a problem of thirst in the desert. Elisha is then sought in both stories and he delivers an oracle promising victory.

194. Both Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 79, and Eph'al, *City Besieged*, 60–61, compare this to the siege of Babylon by Ashurbanipal when they chewed on leather straps due to famine. The Babylonians also resort to cannibalism in this text.

195. Long, *2 Kings*, 93, also suggests that the woman and the king are plot foils in the story.

The first reaction we encounter in Samaria during the siege is the story of the woman who has made a deal with another mother to eat their sons. This is revealed when the woman makes a heartfelt, although customary, cry to the king for deliverance.[196] Hinting at his own grief, which will be revisited in the story, the king replies that only the Lord can help. He is powerless, as he demonstrates with his rhetorical question, מאין אושיעך המן־הגרן או מן־היקב ("From where will I help you? From the threshing floor or the winepress?"). He too is confined by the siege, and so the winepress and threshing floor are equally empty for him. The king is frustrated by his limitations and points to God as the only one who can bring deliverance. Then, remembering he is king and can dispense justice, he offers a more standard response to such a petition and he asks her problem, מה־לך.[197]

The woman's story is grotesque and sounds exaggerated to modern ears, but comparison with other sources suggests that the decline into cannibalism during a siege is not implausible.[198] The woman's consumption of her own child is particularly odious,[199] but this is placed alongside her gullible acceptance of the other woman's deal. Although the reader's inevitable horror at the concept of eating one's own child evaluates the woman's actions as repulsive, the text is to some degree kinder to her. Her gullibility suggests that her mind had become feeble with hunger, and her troubles have been compounded because she has lost her child and is now starving to death anyway. Nevertheless, when she is seeking justice, she overlooks the injustice she has committed against her son and demands the life of another.[200] The story seems to have the same attitude as Deut 28 or Lev 26:29, that the cannibalism of a child (Deut 28:56–57) is itself a punishment. Her story is representative of the universal suffering in Samaria rather than being a condemnation of this particular woman.

196. See also 2 Sam 14:4; 1 Kgs 3:17–27; 2 Kgs 8:5–6.

197. 2 Sam 14:5 and 1 Kgs 1:16. Cohn, *2 Kings*, 49, believes these two stories (David with the woman of Tekoa and Solomon with the two mothers), along with our episode, are a type scene of petition to a king with formulaic entreaties. Thus the delay of the king's usual response מה־לך to the woman is a variation on the type scene, and the reader's attention is drawn to it.

198. Alongside Lev 26:29 and Deut 28:56–57, see Jer 19:9; Lam 2:20; 4:10; Ezek 5:10. See also n. 194 above.

199. Eph'al, *City Besieged*, 61, lists sections of Esarhaddon's succession treaty where cannibalism by parents of their own offspring occurs, although not necessarily during a siege.

200. Stuart Lasine, "Jehoram and the Cannibal Mothers (2 Kings 6:24–33): Solomon's Judgement in an Inverted World," *JSOT* 50 (1991): 28, considers her obliviousness to the moral outrage she has committed as a comedic element.

The mother's account functions in the episode as a snapshot of the social chaos resulting from the siege, and so it sets the scene for the narrative. As we will see in a moment, it will prompt the king's reaction and propel the plot towards the deliverance of Samaria. It functions almost as *mise-en-abyme* by introducing some of the main themes of the narrative. The social chaos of a mother eating her child reflects the social upheaval in that salvation comes through four lepers, the outcasts of society.[201] The theme of salvation through deception, represented by the woman who hides her son, recurs when the Arameans are fooled into thinking an army is coming towards them. Finally, there is no correct answer in the legal plea before the king because an injustice will be done to one of the women either way. There is also no single correct response to this siege situation, particularly from the point of view of the king, as long as God remains silent. These parallels are not complete, but we will return to the idea of *mise-en-abyme* later. When we read the story juxtaposed with the previous story, the thematic parallels are more fully realised.

The horrific case of the cannibal mother prompts the king not to make a judgment like Solomon in 1 Kgs 3:16–28 but instead to express his own grief, tearing his clothes and exposing the sackcloth underneath. LaBarbera proposes that the king compares unfavourably with Solomon,[202] but most other commentators admit that, unlike the case of Solomon, both parties had done wrong and the king cannot be expected to respond other than with grief.[203] Indeed, a comparison with Solomon can be looked upon favourably. The difference between the situations is wide enough that it is understandable there is no solution,[204] and, just as Solomon ordered the baby be cut in half, so the king tears his clothes. There is a parallel in the responses.[205]

Overall, the king is sympathetically portrayed in this story, particularly in the first scene as the mother pleads her case.[206] He takes the time

201. See ibid., 27–53, on the "world-upside-down" *topos* in this story. Also, Long, *2 Kings*, 95.

202. LaBarbera, "Man of War," 646. Cohn, *2 Kings*, 49–50, also makes a negative comparison with "Solomon the wise," but concludes the king's weakness is his powerlessness, which is generated precisely because there is no correct solution to this problem.

203. Lasine, "Jehoram," 42; Bergen, *Elisha*, 138.

204. On the crucial difference between these two problems, see Yair Zakovitch, *"I Will Utter Riddles from Ancient Times": Riddles and Dream-Riddles in Biblical Narrative* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2005 [Hebrew]), 192–93.

205. Ibid., 197.

206. LaBarbera, "Man of War," 637–51, argues that the story expresses a peasant reaction to the military establishment. Walter Brueggemann, "The Embarrassing

to listen to the request of the woman even though he suspects he can do nothing. He demonstrates genuine grief at the suffering of his people when he tears his clothes. The sackcloth underneath shows he has been grieving on the people's behalf even before he learned of this incident. He makes a statement of faith in v. 27 that only the Lord can save them; and Würthwein even suggests that his sackcloth shows he has already appealed for God's help.[207] Although this is not necessarily implied by the attire, his statement that God has not saved them implies he has petitioned him already. This is further implied by his words in v. 33, מה־אוחיל ליהוה עוד ("why should I wait any longer for the Lord?"). The king has turned to the Lord but received no response.

The king's portrayal becomes more ambiguous with his oath to take the head of Elisha in v. 31. When reading the episode in isolation, there is no reason for this threat, and the question is left open about whether his anger is warranted. Elisha's description of the king as בן־המרצח ("[son of a] murderer") would initially confirm a negative evaluation of the king. However, the king's grief at the death of a child and the suffering of his people prevent the audience from fully accepting Elisha's description of him as murderer. Furthermore, the king does not follow through with his threat to kill Elisha but rather acknowledges that the situation is from God and he is willing to listen to the oracle of Elisha.[208]

Footnote," *ThTo* 44 (1987): 11–13, goes further and suggests that the purpose is to delegitimise the king. Similarly, Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 93, considers the story typical of officialdom obstructing the prophet. However, the social comedy is directed against all the characters (Moore, *God Saves*, 94–95; Lasine, "Jehoram," 38), and, as our analysis will suggest, there are many sympathetic elements towards the king. Evaluation of the king as either a "good guy" or "bad guy" is not central to this story.

207. Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 311. In contrast, Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 81, interpret this as the king refusing to pray.

208. We assume that it is the king who speaks in v. 33 as his footsteps are heard immediately after the messenger. As Josephus in *Ant.* 9.4.4 proposes, he perhaps repented of his threat and ran after the messenger, but this is left as a gap in the narrative. Some commentators emend המלאך ("the messenger") to המלך ("the king") (e.g. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 81, following Wellhausen, *Composition des Hexateuchs*, 285), and so it is possible to eliminate the reference to the messenger altogether. However, as Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 80, suggests, even the emendation of v. 33 is not necessary (although possible). The messenger could have spoken on behalf of the king, and so they were effectively the king's words, especially if he was physically present on the scene and the message was given in the first person.

The king may also be criticised for hesitating to act on the advice of the lepers that the Arameans have fled.[209] However, there is good reason for this hesitation as the king explains the potential for deception. Again, this suspicion of deception may have been prompted by the woman's story and the general situation that the Samarians are willing to deceive each other in order to survive. On the other hand, Elisha has already announced that they will be delivered, and so the reader may wonder at the king's lack of faith.

The sympathetic, but not exalted, portrayal of the king is heightened by comparison to the next two reactions to the siege: the elders and the commander.[210] Whereas the king sends his messenger to threaten Elisha, the elders are already seated before the prophet. They demonstrate their ready obedience when Elisha tells them to refuse entry to the king's messenger. Indeed, the elders are doing what the king ought to have done long ago: sitting before Elisha and waiting for an oracle from God.[211] On the other hand, Elisha does not deliver the oracle until the king arrives and says God is responsible for the trouble. The king is effective in prompting Elisha to speak.[212] This contrasts with the story of Naaman in 2 Kgs 5, where the king also tears his clothes in grief in a hopeless situation.[213] In that case, Elisha sends word to the king, but, this time, the king knows to go directly to him. Although the king's reaction is not favourably compared to the elders, he is at any rate better than his chief commander in 7:2. Despite the ongoing motif of servants giving their masters good advice (a theme that will be revisited when a servant convinces the king to investigate the lepers' story), here the servant lacks faith and will be punished. While the king is later hesitant about the word of the lepers, he does not doubt the word of Elisha.

After the oracle, the narrative shifts with a disjunctive *waw* to the perspective of the four lepers. They are without hope, so decide to take their lives into their own hands and approach the Arameans rather than face certain starvation. At the bottom of society, these lepers take the bravest course of action of anyone in the story. Nevertheless, they choose

209. E.g. Long, *2 Kings*, 95, who says the king blames Elisha for the problem but does not acknowledge him for the solution, instead assuming the Arameans have disappeared because of military strategy.

210. Cf. Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 65, who also notes that the king is a multifaceted character and compares his actions positively with the woman but negatively against Elisha.

211. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 80.

212. Bergen, *Elisha*, 142.

213. Cf. Lasine, "Jehoram," 43. He observes the parallel but not the development.

this brave action only as an alternative to death. They throw themselves upon the mercy of the Arameans, believing that they have the power to kill them or let them live (v. 4), rather than go to the Lord or the prophet Elisha. In this aspect, the king appears pious by comparison because he knows that sovereignty belongs to God, and he approaches the prophet rather than surrendering to the Arameans. Furthermore, when the lepers discover the Arameans are gone, they only inform the king after plundering and taking their own fill.

The routing of the Arameans is presented as a miracle from God, not the work of the lepers. First of all, it occurs directly after the oracle from Elisha. The word-play on ארבות ("windows") in 7:2[214] and ארבעה ("four") in 7:3 suggests that the four lepers are the answer to the commander's disbelieving charge that God would have to open windows in the sky to relieve the famine.[215] Another word-play between מצרעים ("lepers") and מצרים ("Egypt") in 7:6 subtly hints that the approach of the lepers could have been mistaken by the Arameans as the sound of an army,[216] although their naivety and the extraordinary nature of this confusion ensures the miracle is attributed to God.

Thus the reactions of these four groups of inhabitants in Samaria prompt one another and ultimately lead to the deliverance of the city. Although the evaluation of the characters is ambiguous, the episode ends with an emphasis on the fulfilment of Elisha's prophetic word: the relief of the siege and the death of the commander of the king. While this reinforces Elisha's authority and power as a prophet from God, it leaves the reader unsure about Elisha as a person. His curse against the commander results in the siege's second reported casualty (the first being the cannibalised child), and it is ironic that after everyone's lives have been saved, the commander dies. Furthermore, Elisha is compared to the king who shows genuine grief at the suffering of his people. The king was also determined to kill Elisha yet changed his mind when face to face with him. By contrast, Elisha has no mercy upon the commander and does not deliver his oracle until prompted by the king.[217]

214. LaBarbera, "Man of War," 647–48, suggests that the windows could be a reference to the god Baal, who rains through them in the Ugaritic mythology. Thus the commander is sarcastically challenging Yahweh as God.

215. Ibid., 648; Moore, *God Saves*, 101.

216. Moore, *God Saves*, 96–97, notes this and suggests it provides literary support to his claim that the lepers and king are contrasted. However, for the reasons given above, we do agree that the lepers are presented as positively as Moore suggests.

217. Bergen, *Elisha*, 140–41, has a similar conclusion although it is also based on the episode's context, which we will examine shortly. He says that the king is

a. *2 Kings 6:24–7:20 Read with 2 Kings 6:8–23*

Despite the contrasting depictions of the Aramean threat in 6:23 and 6:24, the pericope in 6:8–23 primarily corroborates and answers questions in 6:24–7:20. In the analysis of 6:24–7:20 above, it was unclear why the king was angry with Elisha and threatened to take his life. The juxtaposition provides an answer to this question because the chronological time marker allows causation and consequences between the episodes. A reason is given for the king's immediate anger at Elisha and his belief in Elisha's culpability: he was merciful toward the Arameans in 6:8–23, and now they are returned in greater force.[218] Furthermore, in the previous episode, the Arameans surrounded Dothan because they were seeking Elisha personally. Therefore, it is likely that the siege against Samaria was a second attempt to capture Elisha, this time using the whole army. The king has reason to be frustrated at Elisha's inaction because he knows from the previous story that Elisha has miraculous powers. He could easily turn the Arameans away and yet he is doing nothing. This provides an explanation in 6:24–7:20 for why the king instantly forgets his threat when Elisha provides the oracle from God. Elisha's inaction caused his anger because he knows Elisha has the power to perform a miracle.

Elisha's inaction is exacerbated by the plot reversals between the two stories. In 6:8–23 the Samarians surrounded the Arameans, had ample food to provide for them (v. 23), and had the opportunity to kill them (v. 21). Now the Arameans surround Samaria, there is great famine, and Samarian children are dying. This turn-around in events explains the king's extreme grief and his anger at Elisha, whom he sees as responsible by letting the Arameans free.

The enhancement of the mother's story as *mise-en-abyme* justifies the king's threat to Elisha. We have discussed earlier the thematic parallels between the mother's story and the episode in 6:24–7:20: deception, social upheaval, and a problem with no solution. However, the parallels become more complete when the episode is juxtaposed with 6:8–23. If the Samarians correspond to the woman whose son has been eaten, and the Arameans correspond to the other woman who has hidden her son, the parallels emerge. The Samarians have been tricked into providing food to the Arameans (as both women ate the first woman's son, so the Arameans enjoyed the hospitality of the Samarians in 6:23), and now the

portrayed more positively than Elisha and Yahweh, and as Yahweh's character is irreproachable, the reader is inclined to doubt the prophet.

218. See ibid., 140, and Cohn, *2 Kings*, 50, who also interpret the connection between the episodes in this way.

Arameans have returned the king of Samaria's act of mercy with further aggression leaving them hungry (as the other woman did not maintain her side of the bargain and now the first mother is hungry). While the mother's story remains primarily a depiction of the horror of living in a siege, it has the secondary function of echoing the plot and themes of the surrounding story.

These parallels then explain the king's threats against Elisha. He sees the situation as an act of deceit, like the woman in the story. He blames Elisha for telling him to feed the Arameans and let them go, just as the woman allowed the other woman to eat her child. Furthermore, the parallel between feeding and freeing the Arameans, and the morally grotesque action of eating a child may also have prompted the king to evaluate mercy upon the Arameans as a mistake.

Although the juxtaposition explains the king's display of grief and his threat against Elisha in 6:24–7:20, it does not destroy Elisha's credibility; rather, it corroborates positive aspects of his actions. His description of the king, "murderer" in v. 32, has foundation in the king's question in 6:21, הֶאכֵה אכֵה אבִי ('shall I kill, shall I kill, my father?"), alongside the king's threat in 6:31 to kill Elisha. This charge, justified by the surrounding narrative, adds a negative dimension to the character of the king and gives credibility to Elisha. Elisha is further vindicated by the juxtaposition of the episodes because the deliverance of Samaria continues the previous episode and the victory in 6:23–7:20 solves the tensions of both episodes. The reappearance of the horses and chariots in 7:6 shows that Elisha has finally brought the deliverance he promised back in 6:16–17. Indeed, the fulfilment of this particular prophetic word corroborates the other fulfilled prophecies in the episode: the end of the siege and the death of the commander.

Furthermore, Elisha is portrayed positively because the conclusion to the second story now offers resolution to both episodes. This is highlighted by the mirror image plot detail. At the conclusion of 6:8–23, the Arameans are enclosed in Samaria, and they eat the food of the Samarians before being set free. Now in 7:8 the four lepers eat and drink in one of the tents of the Arameans and plunder it, and then all the Samarians plunder the camp in 7:16. The eating and drinking by the Samarians in the Aramean camp demonstrates that they have been set free, like the Arameans in the previous episode, but with the difference that the Arameans themselves have fled. As this scene is a reversal of the beginning of 6:24–7:20, when the Samarians are besieged and have no food, it ties together the two stories and offers a resolution. Elisha's oracle has been fulfilled, and God has delivered victory once and for all over the Arameans.

Finally, the reversal that the Samarians now eat in the Aramean camp is a satisfying poetic justice. The Arameans were ungrateful for the mercy shown them at the end of 6:8–23. However, they receive retribution and now the Israelites eat in their camp, not as an act of mercy, but as a sign of victory.

In conclusion, the juxtaposition of these two episodes answers a number of questions left open by the second episode when read independently. Yet the resulting characterisations of the king and Elisha are left largely unchanged. The stories corroborate the depiction of the king as sympathetic towards his people, even if he is powerless and a little hasty to condemn Elisha. Elisha on the other hand seems impervious to the despair around him but, when prompted by the king, delivers an oracle of hope, which is duly and powerfully fulfilled.

b. *2 Kings 6:24–7:20 Read with 2 Kings 8:1–6*

There is discontinuity between 6:24–7:20 and 8:1–6 marked by a shift in central characters, location, and lack of time designation. The last scene of 6:24–7:20 features the commander of the king being trampled by the people of Samaria as they rush to the Aramean camp to get food. Second Kings 8:1–6 shifts to Elisha and the Shunammite woman. The location shifts from Samaria presumably to Shunem, although it is not named in the pericope, only deducible from the other Shunammite story in 4:8–37. There is also no time designation or other indication of continuity with the previous episode.[219] Thus the relationship between these two stories is best interpreted as parallel rather than chronological.

Indeed, there are many parallels between the two stories, and so comparison is marked. Both stories are set in the time of a famine and feature a mother who takes action in order to find food before making an appeal to the king for justice. Furthermore, in both stories, the woman's words prompt action: first, in moving the king to visit Elisha and, second, in moving the king to restore her lands.[220] However, there are also differences in the second story: Elisha now takes the initiative in helping the mother in the time of famine, and furthermore the king is able to respond to her appeal for justice with an appropriate judgment. This

219. These observations coincide with diachronic theories about the compilation of the Elisha cycle. We will discuss in the next section how this sequel to the Shunammite episode in 8:1–6 is thought either to have originally belonged to the first episode in 4:8–37 or to have been written specifically as a sequel for it.

220. Roncace, "Elisha and the Woman of Shunem," 125, notes that the Shunammite woman's words effectively prompt action in the story in 4:8–37 also, and that is one of the many links between it and 8:1–6.

story offers an ideal characterisation of the king, Elisha, and the mother in a time of famine.

As the connection is not chronological, this ideal situation does not arise because the king and Elisha have learnt from experience. However, the portrayal of the characters in this story will affect how we interpret ambiguities in their characters in the previous episode. The prophet Elisha is depicted positively in this story as he warns the Shunammite woman of the upcoming famine. She is then able to go and live with the Philistines and avoid the terrible consequences of famine experienced in the previous story. This convinces us of Elisha's compassion, that he cares for the weak, including the life of a child. If we were inclined to suspect him of lacking the compassion to relieve the siege in the previous story and to respond to the cannibalism of a child, we are quickly assured in 8:1 that he cares for the Shunammite woman. This is further emphasised by the description of the woman as the one whose son Elisha had restored to life (אשר־החיה את־בנה, "whose son he brought to life"). Gehazi's narration to the king of Elisha's great deeds (כל־הגדלות) suggests that Elisha was not to be blamed for inaction in the previous story. Elisha is an active and powerful prophet in Israel.

The king is also portrayed positively in 8:1–6. He responds to the woman's plea for justice, not only returning her house and field but also the produce of the land from her seven-year absence.[221] Unlike the situation of the cannibal mother where there was no solution but to show grief, now there is a just action within the power of the king, and he performs it. He offers compensation to the woman, reversing the effect of the famine and the problem of the previous episode. Furthermore, he takes her connection to Elisha as sufficient credentials for believing her story and for returning the land that belonged to her. This encourages us to re-evaluate the king's threats against Elisha because they are based upon the knowledge that Elisha is powerful enough to do something against the siege. His willingness to listen to Elisha's oracle is submission to a prophet he trusts.

This ideal depiction of both the king and Elisha in 8:1–6 encourages the reader to assume the best in these characters in the previous story and to focus upon Aram and the commander of the king as the real enemies in this story. The king, Elisha, and the starving mother were victims of the terrible siege who each react in response to the horror around them.

221. The question of how the land was producing during the famine will be dealt with when we examine this story in more detail.

We surveyed earlier the suggestion that 2 Kgs 8:1–6 was not originally part of the Aramean collection of Elisha stories, and therefore 2 Kgs 6:24–7:20 was probably juxtaposed with 2 Kgs 8:7–15 in the earlier collection. This juxtaposition would have had a different effect on the interpretation of 2 Kgs 6:24–7:20. Now Ben-Hadad, who was personally responsible for waging war against Israel in 6:24, is seriously ill, suggesting that this was the completion to the victory against Aram in 6:24–7:20. However, it is only a personal victory for Elisha because Ben-Hadad will die and his successor Hazael will do even worse things to Israel (8:12). As these are the consequences of our episode, we once again wonder at the permanence of Elisha's promised victory. Similar to 6:24, lasting peace with Aram is overturned. There is no longer a positive influence on our evaluation of the king of Israel in 6:24–7:20 because he does not appear in 8:7–15. Elisha is depicted in a position of respect, and this enhances his position as a prophet. However, his prophecy once again leads to death (not only Ben-Hadad but also many Israelites at Hazael's hand). This reinforces any of the reader's concerns about the death of the commander in 6:24–7:20 and Elisha's lack of compassion for the dying children of Samaria. Nevertheless, the real enemy in the stories is Ben-Hadad, who is the aggressor in one story and assassinated at the prompting of Elisha in the next.

Overall, the insertion of 8:1–6 improves the depiction of Elisha because it shows that he is merciful towards the Shunammite and her son, and his great deeds are told in the court of the king. Furthermore, it reflects well on the king of Israel and inclines the reader to interpret his actions more positively in the previous episode.

15. *2 Kings 8:1–6*

Contrary to the independence of the other stories, this episode was written specifically as a sequel to the episode in 4:8–37. While some commentators argue that 8:1–6 was originally a continuation to another story,[222] the recurrence of Gehazi, the woman as dominant in her household, and the resurrection of her son closely associate it with the first Shunammite story. The differences in style and depiction of the prophet Elisha, which we will examine shortly, suggest it was composed at a

222. For example, Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 33, points out that the woman is not called "the Shunammite" in 8:1–6, she is no longer married to an old man, and she is destitute and trying to escape starvation. However, her husband is irrelevant to the story and the lost revenue at the end of the story shows that she was a woman of means.

much later date.[223] Therefore, as well as reading it independently, we shall read it as a sequel to the story in 4:8–37 and interpret it in this context. We will then interpret it in its current context, juxtaposed with the siege of Samaria in 6:24–7:20 and the death of Ben-Hadad in 8:7–15.

a. *2 Kings 8:1–6 Read Independently*

In complete isolation, the story in 8:1–6 is an idyllic depiction of the prophet Elisha, as well as the king of Israel and the Shunammite woman. He has the power to foresee a famine for seven years and the generosity to inform the woman and her family. A back-story is presumed from the reference to the son whom Elisha raised from the dead, and the reader conjectures it was an impressive and powerful miracle. The Shunammite is obedient to the advice of Elisha and duly returns in seven years. Her sojourn among the Philistines might cause hesitation because of their history as enemies of Israel.[224] However, all the surrounding neighbours had been hostile to Israel at some stage, and the parallel to the famine stories in Gen 20 and 26:1–11 also suggests that this was a good location to choose.[225]

The king listens to the woman's request and grants her both the return of her land and the lost revenue from her absence. Commentators have examined whether this was appropriate according to the Law,[226] but the sympathies of the story clearly lie with the woman, and the restoration of her lands is an appropriate action. The great deeds of Elisha are extolled to the king, further emphasising his authority as a prophet and placing him in the role of hero because his name brings about the woman's restoration. There is cooperation between king and prophet as the king responds to the relationship between the woman and Elisha.

223. See, for example, Hentschel, *2 Könige*, 34–35, and Simon, "Elisha and the Woman of Shunem," 230. Schmitt, *Elisa*, 74, suggests it was written using the Shunammite story and the story of the famine in 2 Kgs 4:38–44 to complete the Elisha cycle.

224. Suggested by Bergen, *Elisha*, 150.

225. In Gen 20, Abraham leaves his sojourn with the Philistines with a multitude of possessions. In Gen 26:2–3 Isaac goes to the Philistines because God commands him to stay in the land and not go to Egypt.

226. Bergen, *Elisha*, 151, cites Lev 25:23–25, which says that the land ought to be hers in perpetuity but may need to be redeemed. Long, *2 Kings*, 98, also suggests that the land either became crown land after being abandoned for seven years or that in the seventh year the land had reverted to its original owner (citing Exod 21:2 and Deut 15:1–18). See also Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 100; Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 317.

Two studies have analysed the effect of reading the two Shunammite stories together. Simon perceives 8:1–6 to be a corrective to the negative evaluation of Elisha's personality in 4:8–37. He demonstrates that each of Elisha's weaknesses is corrected in this story, because he now takes the initiative to help the woman, he piously states that the Lord will bring the famine, and he has the power of foresight rather than needing to rectify a situation he himself created.[227]

Conversely, Roncace focuses on the interpretation of 8:1–6 when it is read as the sequel to 4:8–37. He argues that the second story reinforces the flaws of Elisha in the first story. The prophet commands the Shunammite to leave her home, even though she specifically stated her attachment to her own people in 4:13. Just as he ignored her statement in 4:16 that she did not want to be disappointed about a son, he now ignores this wish also. Roncace points out that compared to the drought declared by Elijah in 1 Kgs 17:1, which was a punishment upon Ahab, there is no reason for punishment on the land in 8:1–6, especially as the king is portrayed positively. Moreover, only the Shunammite is reportedly affected by the drought, when she loses her land. Ironically, the Shunammite must now appeal to the king when Elisha previously offered to. Furthermore, Gehazi must speak on Elisha's behalf and the woman must confirm the story. Ultimately Roncace concludes that the restoration of the land is attributed to the king, and the story shows that Elisha's power is inoperative in his absence.[228]

Roncace makes an important point that there are elements of this story that cause the reader to pause when it is read after the episode in 4:8–37. In particular, no one else seems to suffer as a result of the famine, and there is even revenue from the Shunammite's land while she is gone. This creates some parallel with 4:8–37. Elisha performs an unnecessary miracle (first giving the woman her son and then predicting the famine); and it must be corrected (resurrecting the son, restoring her land). Another possible criticism of Elisha is that he does not directly provide food for the Shunammite but rather warns her to leave the land. If this story had been placed after the first Shunammite story in ch. 4, it would

227. Simon, "Elisha and the Woman of Shunem," 258–59. David Jobling, "A Bettered Woman: Elisha and the Shunammite in the Deuteronomic Work," in *The Labour of Reading: Desire, Alienation, and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. F. C. Black, R. Boer, and E. Runions; Atlanta: SBL, 1999), 183, also believes the sequel raises Elisha at the expense of the Shunammite. She is proved wrong that she does not need him to speak to the king for her. However, her character is much less central in this story, and so her characterisation seems to be in comparatively little focus.

228. Roncace, "Elisha and the Woman of Shunem," 109–27.

be surrounded by other narratives where Elisha powerfully multiplies food to alleviate hunger. In 4:1–7 he multiplies the widow's supply of oil, in 4:38–41 he takes out poison from the stew, and in 4:42–44 he feeds one hundred men with only twenty loaves. By comparison, Elisha's warning to the Shunammite woman is considerably less impressive.

Overall Roncace's reading is unnecessarily negative because the parallels between the two Shunammite stories highlight the differences between them. The parallels provide texture to 8:1–6 and create tension when the woman returns and it appears her land is gone. The reader fears it may be another failed miracle by Elisha, but the tension is relieved with a full restoration of her belongings. The doubt over Elisha is dispelled.

Furthermore, Roncace's other criticisms of Elisha in this story are unjustified. For example, Elisha's instructions to the woman to leave her people are vindicated by her ready obedience. Roncace attributes this to Elisha's attribution of the famine to the Lord in 8:1; but the woman also believes that he has the authority of God in 4:8–37 and is willing to dispute with him then. Furthermore, Elisha's provision for the woman in time of famine is particularly affirming for Elisha's character because he is returning the woman's hospitality of food and shelter.

Roncace criticises Elisha because the king must restore the land. He proposes it is a *non sequitur* that she is a beneficiary because of Elisha's reputation.[229] However, in this story, the *non sequitur* is the emphasis of the miracle because in fact all miracles are in some way logical *non sequiturs*. It does not make sense that the king would grant the woman her request just because she was previously the beneficiary of another miracle. The miracle is that Elisha's mere reputation is enough to induce the king to do the illogical.[230] Unlike 4:8–37, Elisha can perform a miracle from a distance, and his offer to intercede with the king in 2 Kgs 4:13 is now acceptable.

Finally, the reader may wonder why Elisha himself is not present to speak on her behalf. However, this question can be left open, rather than being interpreted as an indication of his neglect. For example, several commentators have assumed Elisha died within the seven years, and thus Gehazi has left his service and is telling of his great deeds in the court of the king.[231]

229. Ibid., 124–25.

230. Cohn, *2 Kings*, 56, also interprets this as the power of the man of God to transform the king.

231. Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 32; Gray, *I & II Kings*, 474.

This positive reading, that Elisha corrects his previous mistakes, is supported by the summary of the previous story that focuses only on the great things that Elisha has done, particularly raising the woman's son from the dead. The Shunammite could have been described as the woman who had offered hospitality to Elisha or the one to whom Elisha had given a son. However, instead, it focuses on the most positive and powerful aspect of Elisha in the story of 4:8–37, that he raised her son from the dead. In v. 5 the resurrection of her son is mentioned three times. Despite the questionable circumstances leading up to this resurrection, Elisha is undeniably powerful, and this is remembered in the sequel.

Thus there is reason to agree with Simon's reading that 8:1–6 is a corrective to 4:8–37, showing that Elisha has moved beyond his personality flaws, even if his powers are not now as impressive. Yet, as with all juxtaposition, 4:8–37 conversely affects our interpretation of 8:1–6. The idyllic demonstration of the prophet's power is tempered by the tension of another potentially failed miracle and by comparison to other more impressive miracles where he can multiply food to alleviate hunger. Nevertheless, the details in 8:1–6 ensure that ultimately our reading of Elisha is positive.

b. *2 Kings 8:1–6 Read with 2 Kings 6:24–7.20*

We have already described how the story in 8:1–6 encourages us to read the characters of Elisha and the king in 6:24–7:20 in a positive light. This corrective to the previous pericope in turn affects our reading of 8:1–6. Although Elisha and the king are presented positively in 8:1–6, we know from the Aramean siege that the king has limitations on his power to help his people; we also know that the prophet Elisha is very powerful but lacks mercy toward the people. The recurrence of a famine may lead us to wonder why Elisha does not end the famine as in the previous episode, rather than merely save the Shunammite woman and her family. However, as there is no report of anybody else suffering from the famine in 8:1–6, this reading is not encouraged further by the text. Similarly, the merciful judgment of the king in favour of the Shunammite woman encourages the reader to recall his sympathy for his people when he tore his clothes at their suffering. Both Elisha and the king are read positively in this story when juxtaposed with the story of the Aramean siege. The parallel backdrop of a famine highlights only the positives in 8:1–6 because it is compared well with the desperate situation in the previous pericope. The reader knows that both king and prophet are fallible, but in this situation they have acted well.

While the evaluation of Elisha is not challenged by the previous episode, the nature of his prophetic power is reinforced. Elisha's prediction of the famine at the beginning of 8:1–6 is immediately contiguous with the fulfilment of his prediction that the king's commander would be killed in 7:17–20. This corroboration gives us further reason to believe that Elisha's prophecy in 8:1 is also fulfilled even though we do not hear of any suffering as a result of the famine. Furthermore, the juxtaposition with this story, rather than any of the stories where Elisha directly provides food to his followers (e.g. ch. 4), encourages the reader to understand Elisha's warning to the Shunammite as a positive action, rather than to wonder why he does not instead provide her with food in some miraculous way.

c. *2 Kings 8:1–6 Read with 2 Kings 8:7–15*

The next episode shifts the setting from the court of the Israelite king to that of the Aramean king. The opening, ויבא אלישע דמשק ("and Elisha came to Damascus"), is ambiguous about whether there is continuity with the previous episode or not. Elisha is not present at the end of the episode in 8:1–6, and so there is no continuity in the characters between the final scene and this opening in 8:7. However, Elisha's change of location connects the passage with 8:1–2, which reports Elisha's last known whereabouts with the Shunammite woman, presumably in Shunem. Just as the famine "came" (בא) to Israel in v. 1, Elisha "came" (ויבא) to Damascus. This was probably to avoid the famine, in parallel to the Shunammite woman who also "arose…and went" in v. 2. The smoothest reading of this juxtaposition in the final form assumes that the events in 8:7–15 occurred simultaneously with the events in 8:3–6. This answers one of the questions left open throughout the previous episode: where is Elisha when the woman returns? The juxtaposition and simultaneity between the episodes suggests that Elisha was in Damascus when the woman returned, and thus she approached only the king for assistance. This confirms that Elisha was able to perform a miracle from a distance through the power of his reputation. This idea is further emphasised in 8:7 when Elisha's reputation has preceded him to Aram and his arrival is reported to Ben-Hadad. The great deeds of Elisha recounted to the king in the previous episode are now recounted to the King of Aram, increasing the prestige of the prophet.

This story corroborates the depiction of Elisha's ministry as being predominantly prediction. Just as Elisha predicted the end of the famine in 6:24–7:20 and then the beginning of the famine in 8:1–6, he now predicts the death of Ben-Hadad, the succession of Hazael, and Hazael's

future attacks on Israel. On the one hand, the nature of Elisha's prophecy in 8:7–15 increases the miraculous power of his predictions. Although the narrative does not give an explicit causation, the immediacy with which Hazael enacts the prophecy, indicated by the phrase ויהי ממחרת ("it happened on the next day"), suggests he is prompted by Elisha's words. The prophecy is not merely foretelling what will happen but instigates Hazael's actions. On the other hand, Elisha's weeping at the tragedy Hazael will bring upon Israel suggests that he is helpless to prevent what will occur. The recurrence of famines in 6:24–7:20 and 8:1–6, along with the promise of future disaster, reminds the reader that, although Elisha is powerful and can predict and alleviate the suffering upon Israel, ultimately he does not bring an end to it. There is a constant repetition of tragedy in Israel that is now foreboded in the future on an even greater scale.

16. *2 Kings 8:7–15*

Second Kings 8:7–15 is another episode from the Aramean collection of Elisha stories. In the final form of the book of Kings, the episode recalls 1 Kgs 19:17 and God's instructions to Elijah to anoint Hazael. Although Elisha, not Elijah, features in the episode and he does not actually anoint Hazael, it functions as a delayed fulfilment to the prophecy. The inexactness of the fulfilment suggests that the story was already in existence and a part of the Aramean collection.[232] When the Elijah and Elisha cycles were joined and 1 Kgs 19:1–18 was written, the episode acquired this new interpretation, in addition to being another story about the prophetic ministry of Elisha. It is therefore in a strategic position, sandwiched between the bulk of the Elisha traditions before it and the Jehu narrative shortly after, which also fulfils God's command in 1 Kgs 19.

It has been suggested that the Ben-Hadad named in 6:24 is the son of Hazael and that the unnamed king was probably Jehoahaz or another king from Jehu's dynasty.[233] Even if this was the context for the story when it arose, it is likely that Ben-Hadad was reinterpreted as the father of Hazael once the stories were gathered in the Aramean collection. These are the only two episodes in which a king of Aram is named in the

232. See p. 75 n. 4 on why 19:1–18 was probably written later.

233. Rofé, *Prophetical Stories*, 70–74. He argues convincingly that the positive relations between the unnamed king and prophet, and the unrest between Israel and Aram, fit best in the time of Jehu's dynasty, probably Jehoahaz. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 79, also suggest that the Ben-Hadad mentioned in 2 Kgs 6:24 was the son of Hazael.

Aramean collection, and there is no mention that Hazael's son was also Ben-Hadad. Thus, when the stories were collected, it was most natural to place the succession of Hazael to Ben-Hadad after the story in which a Ben-Hadad has been named.

a. *2 Kings 8:7–15 Read Independently and as Part of the Aramean Collection*

Ben-Hadad is depicted as surprisingly pious for a king of Aram because he sends his messenger directly to Elisha when he is ill. Furthermore, he uses the divine name, "the Lord" (ודרשת את־יהוה, "and inquire of the Lord"), in v. 8, even though he has only been told that Elisha is a man of God in v. 7 (איש האלהים). This suggests he is familiar with Elisha and the God of Israel. There is a gap in the text as to whether he consulted the prophets of other gods first, but, by the exclusion of this information, the reader is inclined to assume piety and belief from Ben-Hadad. If read within the Aramean collection, and more specifically in connection with Naaman's monotheistic declaration in 2 Kgs 5:15, it is even possible to interpret Ben-Hadad's enquiry as exclusive worship of Israel's God.

Although Ben-Hadad exhibits piety in the beginning, Elisha's response to the enquiry suggests otherwise. The message is difficult to understand, both regarding the meaning of the words and Elisha's intent in delivering it. Of primary difficulty are Elisha's words, לך אמר־לו [לא] חיה תחיה והראני יהוה כי־מות ימות ("go, say to him, "you will indeed [not] recover" but the Lord has shown me that he will indeed die"). Most recent commentators agree that the *qere*, לו ("to him"), is original and the *ketib* was a Masoretic emendation so that Elisha would not be lying or telling Hazael to lie.[234] Nevertheless, the emendation alerts us to word-play and ambiguity in Elisha's message. Just as the message is a cause of confusion to modern-day readers, it would have been also for Hazael, the listener. Not only do לו and לא sound very similar, but, as pointed out by Labuschagne, the second person address could conceivably refer to Hazael, and thus Elisha is saying "go, say to him *that* you [Hazael] will live but the Lord has shown me that he [the king] will die."[235]

234. Suggested as far back as Burney, *Books of Kings*, 293. Followed, for example, in Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 90, and Bergen, *Elisha*, 157. לו appears in all the ancient manuscripts except LXX^{B}, where it is omitted altogether.

235. See Rashi on 2 Kgs 8:10. Also Casper J. Labuschagne, "Did Elisha Deliberately Lie? A Note on 2 Kings 8:10," *ZAW* 77 (1965): 327–28. He argues that לאמר ("saying") would be written if it was direct speech. However, there are many examples where לאמר is omitted, especially when the direct speech is within other direct speech (e.g. 2 Kgs 4:13). In favour of this interpretation, we notice that Hazael, the messenger, is introduced by name and is therefore an actual character in

Understanding the statement as direct speech is more natural, but the ambiguity for a listener encourages us to take both interpretations into consideration.

Furthermore, Ruprecht has pointed out the importance of Hazael's question, האחיה מחלי זה ("will I live from this illness?"), for understanding Elisha's answer. As a direct answer to this question, Elisha can be interpreted as saying, "the king will live (that is, not die from his illness), but he will also die (that is, nevertheless be assassinated)."[236] Thus, by only relaying to the king the first half of the message, Hazael does not technically lie but deceives the king into thinking that he will live. Furthermore, Elisha is hinting to Hazael that he will/should kill Ben-Hadad. He suggests to Hazael that he only tell half the truth, that the king will not die of the illness, at the same time telling Hazael that the king will die of unnatural means. Once Elisha has told Hazael that he will be the next king, it is an obvious course of action for Hazael to kill Ben-Hadad after giving him false hope that he will live.

An equally pertinent question, less discussed by interpreters, concerns the purpose of the deceptive oracle. As is demonstrated by the emendation of לו to לא, the story is coherent if Elisha merely sends an oracle reporting death and this death is fulfilled by Hazael killing the king. This is particularly evident by comparison with 1 Kgs 22, where the prophets and Micaiah give a lying prophecy to King Ahab that he ought to go up in battle against Aram. According to 1 Kgs 22:20, this was in order to entice Ahab there and bring about his death. However, in 2 Kgs 9:7–15 the lying oracle will only entice Ben-Hadad into a false sense of security, it does not lead him into battle or hasten his death in an immediately obvious way. One possibility is that the good news is designed to preserve Hazael, God's appointed successor, because there is a danger Ben-Hadad will "shoot the messenger." Another is that Elisha wants to spare Ben-Hadad the bad news because of his piety in sending the messenger to him. It has even been suggested that he sent the false oracle because of fear, thus he is making Hazael king through an underhanded method.[237]

the story (contrary to the common practice of messengers in biblical stories). Thus it is quite possible that he is being addressed personally.

236. Eberhard Ruprecht, "Entstehung und zeitgeschichtlicher Bezug der Erzählung von der Designation Hasaels durch Elisa (2 Kön 8:7–15)," *VT* 28 (1978): 75–76. This is similar to the interpretation of Radak on this verse, that Ben-Hadad will not die from his illness, but God has shown Elisha that Ben-Hadad will be killed.

237. Kissling, *Reliable Characters*, 170–71.

A more probable solution to this question is that it was important for Hazael to murder Ben-Hadad, rather than allow him to die of natural causes, in order to enact a coup and usurp the throne. In every example of usurpation in the northern kingdom in the books of Kings, the usurper murders his predecessor rather than contesting his heir after the predecessor has died. Thus Baasha kills Nadab in 1 Kgs 15:27, Zimri kills Elah in 1 Kgs 16:10, Jehu kills Joram in 2 Kgs 9:24, Shallum kills Zechariah in 2 Kgs 15:10, Pekah kills Pekahiah in 2 Kgs 15:25, and finally Hoshea kills Pekah in 2 Kgs 15:30. The importance of the usurper personally killing the previous king is demonstrated by the exception in 1 Kgs 16:18 when Zimri dies in a fire rather than at the hand of Omri. There is then no clear usurper, so half the people follow Tibni and the other half follow Omri in 16:21–22. Civil war ensues until Omri finally succeeds to the throne. Returning to 2 Kgs 8:7–15, the falsehood told to Ben-Hadad was the only way of ensuring that Hazael could usurp the kingship. If Hazael had told Ben-Hadad that he would die, implying that it would be from the illness, then his death the next morning would be attributed to natural causes.[238] If it were expected that Ben-Hadad would die of natural causes, a quiet assassination in the night with a wet cloth would not be the necessary propaganda for proclaiming Hazael as the usurper and new king. It needed to be obvious that Ben-Hadad was murdered. Secondly, if Elisha told Ben-Hadad the whole truth, that he would not die of illness but be killed, Ben-Hadad would have had himself protected appropriately. Thus the only way to ensure a successful usurpation by Hazael was to tell the king that he would live. These circumstances strongly suggest that the intent of the oracle was to prompt Hazael to take Ben-hadad's life and so usurp the throne.

Despite this conclusion, questions remain about the intent of this oracle. Was it the Lord's plan to ensure Hazael successfully conducted a coup, and was Elisha merely transmitting the description of what would happen? Or did Elisha shape his message such that it would induce usurpation? Why did Elisha deliver the oracle when the future of Hazael becoming king grieved him so much? The ambiguity of the words themselves allows a lot of scope in our interpretation of Elisha's intent, and this is shaped significantly by the context and juxtaposed episodes.

238. Note Gray, *I & II Kings*, 479, suggests that Ben-Hadad may have died of natural causes and that the film placed over Ben-Hadad's face was merely to keep him cool. As argued by Kissling, *Reliable Characters*, 167, this is not plausible because there is no reason for Hazael himself to be performing this function. He wonders why it would be placed only on his face, and he points out that the rapid verb sequence implies a causal connection between the two events.

Read in isolation from the rest of Kings, this episode is explicable only as a demonstration of God's sovereignty or as the outworking of divine intention.[239] Elisha's oracle may be a deliberate suggestion to Hazael to assassinate Ben-Hadad, but there is no reason to suggest that Elisha himself would be the source of the manipulation. From Elisha's point of view, Ben-Hadad must have appeared pious for enquiring of the Israelite God. He accompanies the messenger with ample gifts suggesting Elisha's position in his kingdom is comfortable. Furthermore, as we learn in the course of the oracle, Hazael will prove catastrophic for Israel, inflicting pain upon mothers and children. There is no motivation for Elisha to encourage the coup, and it can be read only as an inexplicable directive from God to which Elisha responds with weeping. The repetition of הראני יהוה ("the Lord has shown me") in vv. 10 and 13 emphasises that this oracle comes from God and it is inescapable.

When this story is read within the conjectured Aramean collection, our interpretation of Elisha is affected and we may understand his motivation more clearly. Juxtaposed with the horror of the woman eating her son in 6:24–7:20, and Elisha's seeming unconcern, there is a possible parallel with Elisha delivering an oracle designed to bring about another such a situation. Perhaps Elisha's weeping is not genuine grief at the prophecy God has given him but rather a deliberate ploy to engage Hazael's interest and provoke him to ask for an explanation. Elisha's explanation of his weeping leads to the explicit statement that Hazael will become king in place of Ben-Hadad, the most pointed prodding of Hazael. Indeed, his very presence in Damascus after the recent Aramean threats is suspicious, pointing to a deliberate ploy to bring about the coup. While Elisha's actions are probably at the command of God, he may also be a party to the manipulation.

Other features of 6:24–7:20 also suggest this interpretation. The tragedy of the siege of Samaria emphasises that Ben-Hadad is not a good Aramean king for Israel, and so there is motivation for Elisha to orchestrate his assassination. Ben-Hadad would have known of Elisha's great power from this episode, and therefore his enquiry may have been motivated not by piety for Israel's God but by the proven effectiveness of Elisha's prophetic role. Finally, in the previous Aramean episode, Elisha delivers harsh judgment against the commander for his lack of faith, as he also does against Gehazi in 2 Kgs 5. Elisha brings death as well as life to Israelites with his oracles, and it is not beyond the scope of interpretation that he would instigate a coup that will ultimately result in disaster for Israel, albeit at the will of God.

239. As concluded by Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 92, and Cohn, *2 Kings*, 612.

Elisha's actions also look suspicious when the episode is read with 2 Kgs 13:14–19, 22–25. In ch. 13, he uses manipulative behaviour in order to influence international events. This time he withholds information from Joash that he must strike the ground more than three times, parallel to withholding from Ben-Hadad that he would die. Furthermore, both of Elisha's prophecies end in favour of Aram against Israel: the first because they will bring much suffering to Israel; and the second because the Arameans will not be annihilated completely. The first time his weeping may seem genuine, but the reader is much more suspicious when the events recur.[240]

Despite this, 2 Kgs 13:14–19, 22–25 contains mercy towards Israel against Aram and ends with the positive note that Israel struck Aram three times. Even if Aram was not annihilated, there was respite for Israel from their terrible suffering at the hands of Aram. The "happy" ending softens any judgment against Elisha for bringing about the terrible intervening events.

b. *2 Kings 8:7–15 Read with 2 Kings 8:1–6*

We have already observed how the insertion of 2 Kgs 8:1–6 within the Aramean stories softens the portrayal of Elisha in 6:24–7:20, and it has the same effect on 8:7–15. As we observed in the previous section, the opening in 8:7 implies that this story occurs in chronological sequence with 8:1. Thus the story provides a rationale for the opening in 8:7: Elisha comes to Damascus because there is a famine in Israel. It is by chance that Elisha is there, that the king hears of Elisha's reputation, and that he sends his messenger to him, not the reverse. We know the power of Elisha's reputation from the previous episode where it was sufficient to induce the king to restore the Shunammite woman's property. We have no cause to suspect Elisha is eager to install the instrument of punishment for Israel. Furthermore, our most recent experience of Elisha is his concern for the Shunammite woman and her child, alongside a reminder that he raised the child from the dead. This is the antithesis of his prophetic description of Hazael's reign in 8:12, who will kill young men, children, and pregnant women. The insertion of 2 Kgs 8:1–6 breaks the pattern of children dying with the deliverance of a woman and her child. Elisha's tears can only be genuine as he mourns the terrible fate that will fall over Israel, undoing his own deliverance of the vulnerable in Israel. Therefore, the juxtaposition with the story of the Shunammite woman in 8:1–6 contributes to a more positive evaluation of Elisha in 8:7–15.

240. Kissling, *Reliable Characters*, 181, also draws this conclusion from the similarities in Elisha's actions in these two episodes.

Furthermore, in the final form of Kings, the episode is read in light of 1 Kgs 19. This offers a reason why Elisha would be part of the coup against Ben-Hadad despite the terrible effects against Israel. He is finally fulfilling God's command to Elijah to anoint Hazael as punishment against Israel for its Baal worship. It is particularly important that Elisha obey the command in light of the oracle against Ahab in 1 Kgs 20:42 for sparing Ben-Hadad's life. There is a heavy penalty for not carrying out this command, and the pending slaughter of Israel is divine judgment for such sins of the past. The opening of the story, ויבא אל ישע דמשק ("Elisha came to Damascus"), may suggest a deliberate intent by Elisha to fulfil God's command to Elijah to go to Damascus in 1 Kgs 19:15. This does not remove the ambiguity surrounding whether Elisha is weeping out of genuine grief or in order to manipulate Hazael, but the overall outcome is now firmly established as the will of God.

Another layer of interpretation is added to this story by the similarities to 2 Kgs 1. Cohn has suggested that both of these stories conform to a type scene also found in 1 Kgs 14 and 2 Kgs 20. The common elements are: a fatally ill king (or king with an ill son) sends a messenger to the prophet; the prophet gives an oracle; the messenger returns to the king and transmits the oracle; the king immediately dies.[241] However, in 1 Kgs 14 the king's son is ill, and in 2 Kgs 20 Hezekiah does not die, so it is tenuous to suggest that this story conforms to a general literary convention. More likely, there is a direct literary relationship between 2 Kgs 8:7–15 and 2 Kgs 1 in which Ahaziah was deliberately depicted as a worse king than even Ben-Hadad of Aram.[242] Nevertheless, the comparison made by Cohn is insightful for our interpretation of 2 Kgs 8:7–15 when read in this final form. In 8:7–15 a foreign king sends a message to Elisha to inquire of the Lord (ודרשת את־יהוה, "inquire of the Lord"), in contrast to Ahaziah in 2 Kgs 1 who sends his messenger to Baal-zebub, a foreign god. From this point of view, Ben-Hadad is depicted as the more pious king.[243] The assassination is not because of the evil of Ben-Hadad, but rather because God has commanded Elijah that Hazael will succeed to the throne as punishment for Israel's apostasy.

241. Robert L. Cohn, "Convention and Creativity in the Book of Kings: The Case of the Dying Monarch," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 603–16

242. Argued in Rofé, *The Prophetical Stories*, 35–40, and followed in McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings*, 93–94. Rofé argues this on the basis of late language in 2 Kgs 1.

243. Cohn, "Convention," 610–12.

c. *2 Kings 8:7–15 Read with 2 Kings 8:16–29*

The oracle to Hazael is positioned before two episodes that return to accounts of the kings of Judah. The shift in the narrative to the kings of Judah, according to the pattern of the rest of the book of Kings, ought not to occur until the death of Jehoram. Cogan and Tadmor suggest that this is because Ahaziah is important to the following story,[244] but the pattern is not similarly broken for Jehoshaphat in 1 Kgs 22:41–50. This is despite him appearing in both the previous story in 1 Kgs 22:1–40 and a later story in 2 Kgs 3:4–27. In this case the introduction to Ahaziah in 8:25–29 flows into the story of the war against Hazael, beginning with the perspective of the southern kingdom before it shifts back to the northern kingdom. This continuity with the Judean episode demonstrates that it is their story also.

The two episodes about the reigns of Jehoram of Judah and Ahaziah relate that Jehoram married the daughter of Ahab and that Ahaziah walked in the way of Ahab. This family connection to Ahab is particularly ominous in light of the prophecy by Elijah that all Ahab's family would be annihilated in 1 Kgs 21:20–24. It provides justification for why Jehu kills Ahaziah but is not condemned for it in 2 Kgs 9:27. Thus there is a logical reason for the notices about the kings of Judah to be placed after Elisha's oracle to Hazael and before the story of the coup of Jehu. The placement of the oracle to Hazael before the Judean stories makes the mention of the daughter of Ahab foreboding because the enactment of Elijah's prophecies is imminent. It also introduces Hazael who will re-enter the story in a war with Judah and Israel in 8:28.

Second Kings 8:16–24 corroborates the message that Israel is in serious danger by contrast with Judah. While 8:16–24 puts the kings of Judah in danger because of their association with Ahab, it gives reassurance in v. 19 that Judah itself will not be destroyed because of David. By subtle implication, this implies that Israel *could* be destroyed because it does not have the protection of the "sake of David." Elisha's terrible prediction of Israel's future at the hands of Hazael is possible.

Finally, the episode in 8:16–24 complements the depiction of social disintegration in Israel by suggesting that upheaval may also take place in Judah. In vv. 20–22 Edom revolts against Judah, and in v. 22 Libnah, a Judean city,[245] also revolts. This rebellion by a Judean city parallels the coup by Hazael, a theme that will be continued in the story of Jehu. It puts Judah in danger of the Aramean threat, even though there is assurance it will not be destroyed completely because of David.

244. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 97.

245. Ibid., 96, locate Libneh as a Levitical city in the Judean Shephelah.

17. *Elisha and the Anointing of Jehu*

The episode in 8:7–15 concludes the sequence of consecutive episodes concerning the prophet Elisha. However, we will look briefly at the remaining mentions of Elisha: the beginning of ch. 9; and then two episodes in 13:14–19 and 13:20–21. These two latter episodes were separated from the rest of the Elisha cycle, so we will analyse the effect of this positioning on the interpretation.

Although Elisha appears briefly at the beginning of the Jehu story in 2 Kgs 9–10, he is an addendum both in the final form and, according to many scholars, from the point of view of the literary history of the story. He does not appear again after 9:1–3, and the rest of the story emphasises the fulfilment of the prophecy of Elijah not Elisha. Elijah's prophecy is mentioned in 9:36; 10:10, and 10:17, and reference is made to Jezebel and Naboth from the Elijah cycle in 9:7–10, 21, 22, 25, 26, and 30–37. The story is in fulfilment of 1 Kgs 19:16 and so is more closely connected to the concerns of Elijah. These prophetic references are considered secondary by many commentators,[246] and, because Elisha is somewhat peripheral to the story, we will not analyse the story in detail. However, it is interesting how the placement of the Jehu story among the Elisha stories affects their interpretation, especially when its theme is thought to be the reason for the inclusion of the prophetic stories in the book of Kings.[247]

The brief appearance of Elisha at the beginning of the Jehu episode links it to the Hazael episode and to the prophecy in 1 Kgs 19:15–18 where he is mentioned alongside Hazael and Jehu. The link to the prophecy connects the Jehu episode even more closely to the prophet Elijah and the fulfilment of his prophecy. Furthermore, the connection of the Jehu story with the Hazael episode draws attention to the parallels

246. Many scholars have recognised that the Jehu story in 2 Kgs 9–10 was probably an early political document that was edited to contain prophetic material, although they disagree on the extent to which this occurred. See, e.g., Schmitt, *Elisa*, 19–23; DeVries, *Prophet against Prophet*, 117–23; Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 328–33; Lloyd M. Barré, *The Rhetoric of Political Persuasion: The Narrative Artistry and Political Intentions of 2 Kings 9–11* (CBQMS 20; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1988), 7–23; McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings*, 70–71. The additions are generally thought to be 9:7–10a, 14–16, 25–26, 27b–29, 36–37; 10:1a, 10–17, 18–28, with some variations among commentators.

247. E.g. White, *Jehu's Coup*, 41–42, believes the Elisha stories were composed for this purpose. Also Baruch Halpern and André Lemaire, "The Composition of Kings," in Lemaire and Halpern, eds., *The Books of Kings*, 146–47. They suggest it is included as a Nimshide apology for the Jehu coup.

between them. Not only are they both coups and changes of dynasty but each is instigated at the suggestion of a prophet. Although Hazael himself kills Ben-Hadad and takes the throne, he does so because Elisha has effectively placed the idea in his head through the oracle. Similarly, the presence of the unnamed prophet (sent by Elisha) causes the commanders to ask Jehu the purpose of the visit; and this reveals that Jehu has been anointed king and brings the oracle to fruition. The oracle's utterance has caused its fulfilment. This demonstrates the role of the prophet in political events, even when it is only from behind the scenes, and therefore casts the events as the fulfilment of the earlier prophecies of Elijah.

18. *2 Kings 13:14–19*

Elisha returns as a central character in the episode of 13:14–19. The conclusion to this episode is in vv. 24–25, but the two halves have been separated by the short excursus on Elisha's death in 13:20–21 and a Deuteronomic summary in vv. 22–23. This story probably belonged to the Aramean collection because it mentions the Aramean conflict and offers an appropriate conclusion to it by predicting the future between Aram and Israel. DeVries considers 13:14–19 to be a later addition to the Syrian collection because it mentions Joash.[248] This is possible, particularly as the other stories do not name the king of Israel and therefore it stands apart from the other stories. However, the anonymity of the kings and the unlikelihood of extended Aramean conflict during the reign of Jehoram have led scholars to suggest that these stories took place during the reigns of Jehoahaz and/or Joash and were later relocated to the time of Jeroboam.[249] Thus the name of Joash in 13:14–19 is possibly original, although it may also be a later addition to harmonise with its context.[250]

a. *2 Kings 13:14–19 Read Independently*

Read entirely in isolation, the pericope in 13:14–19 portrays King Joash positively and the prophet Elisha enigmatically. Joash demonstrates genuine grief at the illness of Elisha, weeping and even addressing him as "my father" in v. 14. When Joash cries to Elisha, "the chariots of

248. DeVries, *Prophet against Prophet*, 122.

249. See p. 69 n. 1, above.

250. Although Miller, "Elisha Cycle," 442–43, 48–49, suggests that Elisha is the anonymous saviour in the Jehoahaz story and that this story was only later associated with Joash.

Israel and its horsemen," Elisha's response is about the future of Israel's military relations with Aram. Thus the phrase is best interpreted as some sort of enquiry about Israel's military. By directing this exclamation to Elisha, the king demonstrates his belief in Elisha's God.[251] This expression of faith can be interpreted as more overt if the phrase is read as a description of *Elisha* as the horses and chariots of Israel, not just as an enquiry about Israel's physical military strength. In other words, Elisha fights for Israel in place of its army.[252] Both of these possible interpretations point to the king's faith in God through Elisha for military strength.

Joash follows each of Elisha's commands obediently in vv. 15–17: taking the bow and arrows, drawing the bow, opening the window, and shooting them. This is emphasised by echoing the verb root of each of Elisha's imperatives in the king's actions. If the story had ended with the hopeful prophecy in v. 17, then the reader would be in no doubt of an optimistic future for his reign and for the defeat of Aram. However, the story continues. Joash is obedient just as before: he is commanded to perform an action (הַךְ־אַרְצָה, "strike the ground") and he duly obeys (וַיַּךְ, "and he struck"). Although no mention is made of the number of times he ought to strike, the man of God becomes very angry that Joash has struck the ground only three times, not five or six. It is difficult to blame Joash for this deficiency when he has followed Elisha's instructions so carefully.[253]

This episode was probably juxtaposed with 2 Kgs 8:7–15 in the Aramean collection, and, by analogy to Elisha's deception of Ben-hadad, Elisha may again be deliberately withholding information. On the other hand, Elisha is described as a man of God when he bursts out in anger against Joash, and we assume he has some enigmatic purpose of divine origin.

251. E.g. Bergen, *Elisha*, 167.

252. See, e.g., Beek, "Chariots and the Horsemen," 1–10, on this interpretation in 2:12. See also Josephus, *Ant.* 9.8.6, who interprets Joash's words by saying that Elisha overcame the Syrians with his prophecies. Josephus ignores the Deuteronomic note and writes that Joash was a good man and not at all like his father.

253. E.g. Bergen, *Elisha*, 167. Kissling, *Reliable Characters*, 181, suggests that it is a deliberate and arbitrary act of deception by Elisha, and commentators are blind to this because of a presumption of an idealistic portrayal. However, the text encourages this portrait of Elisha, and therefore such a presumption is meant to affect our reading by suggesting that he is enigmatic rather than deceiving. Cf. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 170, and Jesse C. Long, *1 & 2 Kings* (CPNIVC; Joplin: College Press, 2002), 407, who suggest that the king should have known this and that it demonstrates a lack of faith. However, the reader is equally ignorant that five or six strikes were necessary, so we sympathise with the king's ignorance.

b. *2 Kings 13:14–19 Read with 2 Kings 13:10–13*

The pericope in 13:10–13 is a Deuteronomic notice about King Joash which summarises his reign.[254] This notice states unequivocally that Joash did evil in the eyes of the Lord and that he walked in the ways of Jeroboam. Indeed, he even named his son Jeroboam. This negative assessment of Joash sharply alters our reading of 13:14–19. We are now disposed to assume the worst in Joash, and, when he strikes the ground only three times, this is some kind of failure by Joash, the nature of which is left as a gap in the narrative. Conversely, predisposed to evaluate Joash as evil in the eyes of the Lord, we are less likely to doubt Elisha, and we will assume that his anger is righteous. Joash can now be characterised as a dying but unworthy king desperately calling upon the prophet. Elisha offers him the arrow of victory, but he is not worthy of the full measure of God's mercy.

c. *2 Kings 13:14–19 Read in Sequence with the Other Elisha Stories*

Although this juxtaposition with 2 Kgs 13:10–13 encourages a negative reading of Joash, the episode itself gives voice to a positive portrayal, as do the connections with other stories in the Elisha and Elijah cycles. In 13:1–9 Jehoahaz is similarly evaluated as doing evil in the eyes of the Lord, but he later entreats the Lord in v. 4 and Israel receives a saviour (v. 5). This parallel emphasises that mercy is possible for a king even if he is evaluated negatively. Perhaps Joash has also turned in repentance. A positive representation of Joash's request for mercy enters into dialogue with the black and white evaluation from the Deuteronomic note.

Although the episode is not directly juxtaposed with 13:1–9, its placement in sequence with this pericope affects the interpretation. Verse 7 says that Jehoahaz was left with an army of no more than fifty horsemen, ten chariots and 10,000 footmen (כי אם־חמשים פרשים ועשרה רכב ועשרת אלפים רגלי). In close sequence with this report, it is natural to interpret Joash's cry in v. 14, "the chariots of Israel and its horsemen," as referring to this depletion of Israel's physical horses and chariots. Nevertheless, the repetition of this phrase from 2:12, alongside the divine horses and chariots in 2 Kgs 6:17 and 2 Kgs 7:6, ensures that there is still a connotation of a request for divine help.

There are a number of other ways that the interpretation of this episode is affected by the parallel appearance of the phrase אבי אבי רכב ישראל ופרשיו ("my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen")

254. See Long, *2 Kings*, 164.

in 2 Kgs 2:12.[255] Now that both Elijah and Elisha are addressed in this way at the end of their ministries, a link is made between them. This encourages the reader to notice other less deliberate parallels. Joash striking the ground (ויך) is reminiscent of Elijah striking the water in 2:8 (ויכה), an action also mimicked by Elisha in 2:14. The mention of a battle with the Arameans at Aphek recalls 1 Kgs 20. The imperative הך ('strike") in 13:18 in this context then draws a parallel to the unnamed prophet's command, הכיני ('strike me"), in 1 Kgs 20:35 and 37, which led to the condemnation of Ahab.

Secondly, the palpable connection with 2 Kgs 2 suggests that Joash is cast as a second Elisha. While it may seem initially far-fetched to parallel Joash with Elisha, the inclusion of the Jehu material strengthens this parallel because Jehu is cast as a second Elijah.[256] In the Jehu story, there is not only constant reference to the fulfilment of Elijah's prophecies but Jehu himself echoes the actions of Elijah. He is in conflict with the house of Ahab, and the scene in 2 Kgs 10:18–28 strongly echoes 1 Kgs 18:20–40. In 2 Kgs 10 there are burnt offerings (עלות, v. 24) at the gathering of prophets of Baal (נביאי הבעל, v. 19). Jehu orders that none are to escape (מלט, v. 24) and that they must kill them (נכה, v. 25). He then turns the temple of Baal into a latrine (למחראות, v. 27). These features all echo 1 Kgs 18:20–40. Elijah also gathers the prophets of Baal (נביאי הבעל, v. 25) and makes a burnt offering (העלה, v. 34), this time to the Lord. Elijah orders that none of them escape (מלט, v. 40) and they are killed (although a different root שחט is used, v. 40). He even makes a scatological reference with regard to the prophet Baal (שיג, v. 27).

With these striking parallels between Elijah and Jehu, it follows that there could also be parallelism between their successors, Elisha and Joash. Joash attends at the terminal illness of Elisha just as Elisha attended his predecessor before his ascent into heaven. He then repeats Elisha's words and echoes his act of "striking." Furthermore, in the final form of the book of Kings both Elisha and Joash are largely concerned with an Aramean threat. Finally, the fact that this scene echoes the succession scene of Elisha to Elijah suggests that it is also a succession. The kingly succession to the prophet portrays King Joash even more positively than when the story is read alone. The comparison between Joash and Elisha, and the casting of Joash as a second Jehu, depicts Joash as a great figure in Israel.

255. See above, p. 202 n. 31, where it is suggested 2 Kgs 2:12 is probably dependent upon 2 Kgs 13:14.

256. This phenomenon is also studied in White, *Jehu's Coup*, 24–31, although she uses these parallels to argue the Elijah stories were written specifically for this purpose.

Although Jehu is cast in the role of Elijah, eliminating the house of Ahab and the worshippers of Baal, ultimately he follows in the way of Jeroboam (10:29) and does not take the place of the prophet. His dynasty will now only continue for four generations. Similarly, Joash falls short and strikes the ground only three times. As a result they will not annihilate the Arameans. This reinforces that these kings cannot take the role of the prophets.

Finally, the comparisons with 2 Kgs 2 lead us to compare Elisha's departure from the world with that of Elijah. Whereas Elijah ascended gloriously to heaven accompanied by a chariot and horses of fire, Elisha is dying from a slow illness. Furthermore, unlike Elijah, he does not appoint a successor, and with his death goes this major prophetic role in Israel.

In summary, our interpretation of this short episode alternates several times based on the previous stories. In particular, our interpretation of "my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen" changes such that it is better to consider a number of interpretations simultaneously. Similarly, our evaluation of Joash and Elisha changes, and their actions do not have a clear explanation. Multiple voices join together to give us answers to questions raised in the short episode, but simultaneously they make it difficult to determine one definitive interpretation in the final form.

d. *2 Kings 13:14–19 Read with 13:20–21*

The short notice about Elisha's death is itself difficult to interpret because of the ambiguity surrounding whether Elisha or the man thrown into his tomb springs to life. Either could be the subject of the verb ויחי ("and he came alive"). To some degree, this short episode improves the depiction of Elisha's end compared to Elijah's glorious ascent to heaven. Whether Elisha's bones cause the other man to come to life (as most commentators assume) or Elisha himself comes alive through contact with the other man, it is a much more impressive ending than the depressing prophecy to Joash as Elisha slowly dies of illness.

The insertion of vv. 20–21 (and the summary Deuteronomic note in vv. 22–23) also affects our interpretation because the conclusion of Israel's fate with Aram is not immediately related until vv. 24–25. Although the marauding band in v. 20 is Moabite, it suggests that there is no peace in Israel, complementing Elisha's prophecy of continued Aramean aggression. The depiction of Elisha's power encourages the reader to believe Elisha's prophecy in the previous episode. However, the conclusion in vv. 24–25 suggests a different interpretation. Jehoash takes the cities lost by Jehoahaz back from Hazael's son, Ben-Hadad,

and it is reported that he defeated Ben-Hadad three times just as Elisha prophesied. Surprisingly, the note ends there, and neither Joash nor the Arameans surface again. This implies that the prophesied incomplete defeat of the Arameans does not take place. Joash defeats the Arameans three times and this is the end of the matter, contrary to the prophecy of Elisha. The insertion of vv. 20–21 and vv. 22–23 delay this ending of unfulfilled prophecy.

19. *2 Kings 13:20–21*

This short episode was probably detached from the rest of the wonder story collection for the obvious chronological reason that Elisha's death needed to be placed last. It also belongs naturally after the previous episode where Elisha is on his deathbed.

a. *2 Kings 13:20–21 Read Independently*

Read alone, this episode is ambiguous and enigmatic. This is primarily because the subjects of many of the main verbs are debateable. In v. 21 it is unclear who is burying the man, whether the Moabites or the Israelites. The tenses of the verbs suggest that the subject of ויהי הם קברים ("and it happened as they were burying him") should be the same as the previous *wayyiqtol* ויקברהו ("and they buried him"). Nevertheless, a reading that the marauding bands of Moab are burying the man is not excluded.[257] Moreover, depending on who is burying the man, it is unclear whether he is an Israelite or Moabite. An even more complicating problem for our interpretation is the question of who rises from the dead: Elisha or the man thrown into his tomb? Again, the grammar suggests that the subject of ויחי ויקם על־רגליו ("and he was alive and he stood on his feet") is probably the same as the subject האיש ("the man") in the previous clause; but as Elisha is the final word in the previous clause, it is possible that he is the subject of the juxtaposed verb.

These ambiguities allow for several possible scenarios in the story. The one assumed by most commentators and readers of the story (albeit

257. For this to be the case, we must interpret the clause והנה ראו את־הגדוד ("and behold, they saw the bands") as being from the perspective of the Israelites who saw the marauding band of Moabites. This caused the Moabites to fear and throw the body in the closest tomb. The story then shifts back to the perspective of the Moabites in the next clause. This interpretation is possible because of the use of the particle הנה, which often indicates a shift in perspective. However, it can also indicate surprise, allowing the subject of ראו ("they saw") to be the הם ("they") from the previous clause.

in context of the final form) is that a group of Israelites was burying a man, they saw a band of Moabites, and, in order to escape, they threw the body into the tomb of Elisha. When the (Israelite) body touched Elisha, the Israelite came to life and stood up. It is therefore commonly interpreted as a wonder story of Elisha, glorifying him even after death because he has the power to raise a man from the dead.[258] If we read the story independently, this interpretation is problematic because there is no praise given for the prophet Elisha and little confirmation of the effectiveness of the miracle.[259] The man comes to life, but there are no witnesses, and the story ends abruptly after he stands up. Furthermore, it is not even clear that the man is dead because, although Elisha definitely died (וימת אלישע, "and Elisha died"), the man is only reported as being buried. The verb ויחי may mean that the man who was thrown into the tomb was already alive, not necessarily that he came back to life.[260] Finally, we wonder that Elisha brings this anonymous man back to life for no reason. It is a display of power, but it serves no particular purpose when no one is there to see it. If the alternative reading is accepted, that it may have been a Moabite who was thrown into the tomb by Moabites, the miracle becomes even more redundant. In this case it is absurd that he would bring the enemy back to life. If the ambiguities are read in this way, the story is not entirely extolling him as a prophet. He has the power to bring a man to life, but it has no purpose and he himself remains dead.[261]

The story also makes sense grammatically if the subject of the verbs ויחי ויקם על־רגליו ("and he was alive and he stood on his feet") is Elisha, not the man thrown into his tomb.[262] Again, this understanding of the story does not entirely extol the prophet Elisha because, in effect, the man thrown into the tomb performs the miracle, not Elisha. Furthermore, the resurrection occurs without mention of God or even that Elisha was a prophet or man of God.

In all these interpretations, the emphasis is on the resurrection of someone from the dead. However, a better interpretation places the

258. See Sir 48:13–14, as well as, e.g., Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 150; Long, *2 Kings*, 166; Cohn, *2 Kings*, 88–89.

259. This, and many of the following observations, are made in Yair Zakovitch, "'Elisha Died… He Came to Life and Stood Up' (2 Kings 13:20–21): A Short 'Short Story' in Exegetical Circles" (Hebrew), in *Shaʾarei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon* (ed. M. Fishbane and E. Tov; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 56*–57*.

260. See *HALOT*.

261. Zakovitch, "Elisha Died," 56*–58*.

262. Ibid., 56*.

reversal of an insult on Elisha's grave as the story's central message. This interpretation accounts for the ambiguities and presents Elisha in a very positive light. The foundation for this emphasis is that the burial in Elisha's tomb is dishonourable for the man and therefore an insult to Elisha's tomb. The most honourable type of burial in ancient Israel was with one's own family.[263] Although another family's tomb was better than no burial at all, it was still an unfortunate result of an unexpected emergency. The dishonour for the man buried in Elisha's tomb is illustrated from 1 Kgs 13 where a man of God from Judah is buried in a tomb that does not belong to his family. The story states specifically that burial in another family tomb is the punishment for eating at the house of the prophet at Bethel (vv. 20–22).

The insult to Elisha is magnified because there is no consent from his family and the man is simply thrown in there. At least in 1 Kgs 13 the burial has the consent of the family, and the prophet of Bethel himself brings the man to the tomb. In v. 30 he calls him "my brother" (אחי), suggesting that he sees the act as bringing the man into his family. The dishonourable burial affects not only the dead man but also the family who owns the tomb.

Therefore, it was an insult to Elisha's tomb for the man to be thrown in there dishonourably without the consent of Elisha's family. The use of the verb וישליכו ("and they threw") is another indication of dishonour because it occurs repeatedly in other examples of shameful burials.[264] In light of this situation, the miracle in this story is that any blight upon Elisha's memory is removed and there is no longer a stranger buried in his tomb.

This interpretation can be maintained regardless of the ambiguities in the story. First, although it is most likely that an Israelite man was thrown into the tomb, the possibility of a Moabite man is an even greater insult. It was more necessary to reverse the situation so that Elisha did not share a tomb with the enemy. Secondly, it is not important whether the man thrown into the tomb was actually dead or alive, because the focus is on the fact that he did not remain in the tomb, rather than on Elisha's power to raise someone from the dead. Even the ambiguity in who is raised from the dead does not radically alter the meaning of the story. Either way, Elisha and the stranger are no longer sharing a tomb, and the insult is reversed. Furthermore, it explains why there is no praise of Elisha or even a witness to the miracle.

263. Saul M. Olyan, "Some Neglected Aspects of Israelite Internment Ideology," *JBL* 124 (2005): 603–4.

264. Ibid., 606–7.

The message of the story is similar to the episode in 2 Kgs 2:23–25.[265] Elisha's raw power to slaughter 42 youths is not exactly laudable. More importantly, the purpose of the terrible slaughter is to remove the insult to Elisha, so there are no witnesses to what Elisha has done. Similarly, the point of 2 Kgs 13:20–21 is not that Elisha has the power to raise someone (or be raised) from the dead. This part of the miracle is related confusingly and almost mocks the dead Elisha who has potentially brought the enemy back to life as an ironic favour. Instead, the central message of the story is that the insult to Elisha, God's prophet, is reversed.

b. *2 Kings 13:20–21 Read with 2 Kings 13:14–19 and 2 Kings 13:22–25*

As described earlier, our episode in 13:20–21 and the Deuteronomic note in 13:22–23 were inserted into the story of Joash and the Aramean threat. This new context for our episode explains that Elisha died from an illness and establishes that it was the man thrown into the grave who rose from the dead. Elisha did not rise from the dead because he does not appear again in the book.

The previous episode, which also features Elisha, corroborates the depiction of him in vv. 20–21 because there is no emphasis on his role as miracle worker. Just as he lies dead in a tomb in vv. 20–21 and does not rise (or else he rises but to no avail), so also in 13:14–19 he is dying of an illness from which he has no hope of recovery. This is intensified by the episode in 13:14–19 because it draws a contrast with the episode in 2 Kgs 2 where Elijah ascends to heaven. Elijah avoids death but Elisha does not recover from illness. The appearance of the Moabites in vv. 20–21 gains additional significance because they would have attacked Israel near the Jordan and therefore the whole story occurs in geographical proximity to the Elijah story.[266]

Furthermore, the juxtaposition links our story more closely with the episode in 2 Kgs 2:23–25 because of the verbal link between 2:12 and 13:14, "my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen," and then the close connection between 2:23–25 and 2:1–18. These episodes are also concerned with the dignity of the prophet Elisha, despite the unflattering comparison between his predecessor Elijah who "goes up" and Elisha who is taunted to "go up" by the youths. Although Elisha will not "go up" to heaven as Elijah did, he still has power from God to avenge his reputation by cursing the young men. Furthermore, the

265. Note that these stories probably came from the same collection of Elisha stories.

266. Zakovitch, "Elisha Died," 59*.

king's treatment of Elisha in 13:14–19 suggests the prestige of Elisha in Israel. He is called "my father" by the king, showing great respect, and the king weeps at his illness. Elisha's status in Israel is such that it is an insult to throw the body of an anonymous man into his tomb.

In the story's current position, the miracle that a man comes to life becomes more prominent and stands alongside the theme of Elisha's reputation. This is primarily because of the juxtaposition with the Deuteronomic note in vv. 22–23. This note describes how the Lord had compassion on Israel in the time of Jehoahaz and, in particular, how he was not willing to destroy them or "cast them out from his presence"—repeating the root שלך ("to throw") in השליכם ("he cast them") from v. 21 where it is used in the *hiphil*. Thus a parallel is drawn: just as the man "cast" into Elisha's tomb came alive, so also God will have compassion on the people of Israel. Elisha is dead but Israel may still be saved.[267] This parallel is interesting because it explains why this Deuteronomic note, otherwise a redundant repetition of 13:1–8, is inserted in this position.

Furthermore, the parallel prompts the reader to consider Joash's threefold victory over the Arameans as connected with the prophet Elisha. This is despite the contradiction with his prophecy in 13:19 that they would not be entirely annihilated. The change in God's mind can be explained as an act of mercy, both by analogy with the resurrection of an anonymous man and with his earlier compassion on Jehoahaz. The reader is able to fill in the gap of why the Aramean threat ended: not because Elisha delivered a false prophecy but because of God's mercy. The insertion of the episode about Elisha's death notice in this position improves the depiction of Elisha and validates his prophecy in the surrounding stories.

267. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 170; Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, 230–31; Long, *1 & 2 Kings*, 408.

Part C

Conclusions on Juxtaposition and Biblical Narrative

Chapter 8

Conclusions on Juxtaposition and Biblical Narrative

In this study, a framework for understanding the dynamics and interpretation of juxtaposed units in biblical narrative has been proposed. It has been argued that juxtaposition was often deliberately used by editors and authors to shape the readers' interpretation of stories, episodes, and scenes in biblical narrative. The prominence of this technique throughout the history of biblical interpretation requires particular attention from modern-day interpreters.

It was demonstrated that there are two main ways to interpret juxtaposed episodes. The first is chronological interpretation, which only applies when the episodes or stories have been placed in direct chronological sequence. The juxtaposition then implies a relationship of causation, consequences, or background information between the narrative units. The second type of interpretation applies to all juxtaposed episodes and functions like a visual pattern. The episodes interact with their surroundings through parallels, contrasts, common themes, and other elements. Using concepts from Bakhtin, these episodes can be described as being in dialogue with one another. The different ideas contained within them contradict, corroborate, or question and answer the ideas embodied in the juxtaposed episodes.

To conclude and summarise the synchronic significance of this study, we will approach it from a different angle to the one taken thus far. We will use the Bakhtinian framework of the types of dialogue between voices: questions and answers, corroboration, and contradiction. However, we will apply these types of dialogue to the tasks of interpreters who are searching out the meaning and significance of the text. In this way, we will summarise our findings on juxtaposition and, by using examples from the Elisha cycle, simultaneously offer a synthesis of our case study on Elisha.

First, we will look at how a question and answer dialogue between juxtaposed units can answer many of the questions posed by modern interpreters: Why is an episode there? What is the main point? How do we evaluate the characters and their actions? What are the causes for events and motivations for characters? And how do we understand the role of God in these stories and their theological significance for the authors/editors? Secondly, we will look at the new meaning created by the juxtaposition. Meanings that were not present in the individual episodes are created when they enter dialogue with one another. In other words, themes are created and characters are developed, making the story more complex and meaningful. Finally, we will demonstrate that this framework can also be applied to whole stories in biblical narrative, not just shorter episodes.

1. *Questions, Answers, and the Interpreter's Inquiry*

In the Introduction it was argued that juxtaposition was a deliberate device, known and used by the editors and authors of the Bible. It can be traced back to inner-biblical interpretation, and so we have confidence in using this "literary device" to guide our interpretation of the intended meaning of the text. In analogy to Bakhtin's description of adjacent texts questioning and answering one another, many of our questions as interpreters can be answered by looking at juxtaposition. We will look at each of these questions by giving examples from the Elisha cycle.

a. *How Do We Interpret This Strange Story?*

As the episodes in the Elisha cycle are not connected in a single plot line, the question why an episode has been included arises in almost every single case. None of the episodes is necessary to the sense of the storyline, and instead each contributes to overall themes and patterns. Of course the episodes may have been included for any number of reasons, for example, an editor's desire to incorporate all available traditions. However, sometimes a story will seem particularly strange and difficult to interpret with the other episodes, and we wonder whether it has been retained for any reason apart from it being available.

One such episode is 2 Kgs 2:23–25, where Elisha curses the children who are subsequently mauled by two bears. Why would such a violent and unpleasant story be kept in the cycle? Especially one in which Elisha appears vengeful, and God unmerciful, towards small children? Juxtaposed with 2:19–22 and 2:1–18, the short episode and its details suddenly

have significance beyond a shocking tale of children being slaughtered. The episode now legitimises Elisha as Elijah's successor. The insult "go up you baldhead" is an unflattering comparison to Elijah, and, moreover, it is shouted by the children of Jericho, whom Elisha has just saved from a bad water supply. It is an attack on Elisha's prophetic authority and must be dealt with. It is also a comment on the effectiveness of Elisha's prophetic word and on the reality that the prophet will bring death as well as life. These are the reasons that such a strange story would be included, or at least retained, in the Elisha cycle.

Similarly, the episode of the floating axe-head in 2 Kgs 6:1–7 is difficult to explain because it can be considered a pointless, even eccentric, miracle for Elisha to perform. Even though this episode has been taken out of its original context with the other wonder stories of Elisha, it is explained by the stories surrounding it in its final form. The triviality of the miracle is increased by comparison to Elisha's healing of Naaman and his ability to give the king of Israel information about the Aramean army. Yet these surrounding episodes demonstrate that it was an honour for the sons of the prophets to have Elisha accompany them. Compared to his curt instructions to Naaman to wash in the Jordan, Elisha is willing to accompany the prophets to the Jordan personally and then perform a miracle for their benefit. Furthermore, the sons of the prophets' submission before Elisha is contrasted with Gehazi's insubordination, demonstrating the appropriate way to respond to the prophet. The triviality of the miracle and the behaviour of the sons of the prophets now have a purpose beyond a strange execution of Elisha's prophetic powers.

b. *What Is the Meaning of the Details?*

By looking at the surrounding episodes, an interpreter can often find an explanation for unusual or irrelevant details in the text. For example, in 2 Kgs 2:1–18 the episode centres upon the succession of Elisha to Elijah. However, the reader may wonder why the two men make a journey from Gilgal to Bethel and to Jericho before crossing the Jordan for Elijah's ascension, and whether these details have any meaning beyond mere trivia. These place names gain significance by the juxtaposition with 2:19–22 and 2:23–25, where Elisha makes the journey in reverse to demonstrate his succession. Similarly, the threefold repetition that Elisha will not leave Elijah echoes Elijah's threefold demonstration of his power against the servants of Ahaziah in 2 Kgs 1. At the other end of the Elisha cycle, inconsequential details in the two episodes about the kings of Judah in 2 Kgs 8:16–24 and 8:25–29 have meaning because of the

juxtaposition with 8:7–15 and 9:1–10. These latter two episodes are enacting God's judgment against the house of Ahab and Baal worshippers, in fulfilment of the Elijah cycle. Thus the allusions to Ahab in 8:18, 26–29 are deliberately ominous, and not merely trivia regarding the Judean kings Joram and Ahaziah.

c. *What Is the Emphasis of the Episode?*
There are many examples where the juxtaposed episodes point to a particular emphasis in an episode. If the episode about the healing of the water at Jericho in 2 Kgs 2:19–22 is read alone, the main point of the story is Elisha's miraculous power or an aetiological tale of the waters of Jericho. However, juxtaposed with 2:1–18, it is about the confirmation of Elisha as prophet, and the story has echoes of Moses' healing of the waters at Marah after crossing the Red Sea. Greater emphasis is placed on the specific legitimation of Elisha's prophetic word. Even though this is a central concern when the story is read alone, it is confirmed by the juxtaposition with 2:23–25 where Elisha's prophetic word once again features.

d. *Resolving Ambiguity*
Ambiguity is often resolved by looking at the surrounding episodes. In 1 Kgs 19:19–21 it is ambiguous why Elijah tells Elisha to go back after he throws his mantle on him. When the episode is read alone, the evidence points in several different directions. However, the previous episode in 1 Kgs 19:1–18 reveals that Elijah no longer wanted to be prophet. Thus, in vv. 19–21 he wants Elisha to take his place even though Elisha refuses.

e. *How Do We Evaluate the Characters and Events?*
When interpreting an episode, one of the reader's main interests is how to evaluate the characters and events: Were they positive or negative? Are their decisions right or wrong? Are the events good for Israel or bad for Israel, pleasing to God or displeasing? Juxtaposed episodes can sometimes clarify or change the way we evaluate each episode. In 2 Kgs 3:4–27 it is possible to evaluate King Jehoram in a positive light and Elisha's criticisms as unfounded. However, 3:1–3 informs the reader that Jehoram did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and therefore we side with Elisha's misgivings. Simultaneously, the juxtaposed episodes help us to evaluate the Israelites' retreat at the end of the episode and to interpret the partial failure of Elisha's prophetic word. On the one hand, it is a

failure by comparison with 4:1–7 where Elisha's word is reliable. On the other hand, we are reassured by the adjacent episode that Elisha is powerful and perhaps there are other reasons for the turn in events. The sinfulness of Jehoram in 3:1–3 is one such possible reason. The surrounding episodes guide us towards a complex evaluation where Elisha is limited, but not delegitimised, as a prophet. Similarly in 2 Kgs 8:7–15 it is unclear how we ought to evaluate Elisha's character: is he genuinely grieved at Israel's future? The previous episode where he is compassionate towards the Shunammite woman suggests that indeed he is. Finally, the events in 2 Kgs 2:23–25 are difficult to evaluate because the mass slaughter of children is so repulsive. Yet the previous episodes assure us that the punishment had a reason.

f. *What Are the Causes or Motivations in the Episode?*
The causes of events and motivations for characters can usually be found in chronologically prior episodes. For example, in 2 Kgs 6:24–7:20 the Aramean army surrounds Samaria without overt explanation but a cause is found in the previous episode in 2 Kgs 6:1–23. They are launching a full-scale attack in response to the capture and release of their marauding bands. Moreover, it is likely they are seeking Elisha with these additional forces because they know that he is in Samaria, and it was him they originally sought in Dothan in the previous episode. The reason for the Israelite king to threaten and seek Elisha is thus revealed, because Elisha is the indirect cause of the siege. Similarly, Elisha's accusation of "murderer" against the king has a cause in the previous episode when he makes a request to kill the Arameans. In another example in 2 Kgs 5, the surrounding episodes suggest Gehazi was not necessarily greedy in asking Naaman for a gift but rather he is motivated by famine. However, he is still reprehensible because the surrounding episodes demonstrate Elisha will provide for the sons of the prophets.

g. *What Are the Theological Implications of an Episode?*
The surrounding episodes can answer questions about the theological meaning of the story. In 2 Kgs 4:1–7 God is not mentioned in the miracle, and the only reference to him is that Elisha is a man of God. However, the surrounding episodes, where Elisha prays directly to God, establish beyond question that he is the source of the miracle.

On a more complex level, the theological implications of the instigation of Hazael's assassination in 2 Kgs 8:7–15 are explained by the surrounding episodes. The episode afterwards offers a reason for the

terrible fate awaiting Israel. It alludes to the king of Judah's sin but says that God would not destroy them for the sake of David, a reprieve that does not apply to Israel. The reference to Ahab reminds the reader that the anointing of Hazael would happen as a punishment against Israel for the worship of the Baals and for the failures of Ahab, not because of unwarranted divine cruelty against them.

2. *Corroboration and the Creation of Themes*

Just as different squares of material can join together to create a patchwork quilt, so different episodes join together to create new meanings that did not exist in the individual episodes. This is the second reason why interpreters should pay attention to juxtaposition in biblical narrative—not only can it answer questions but it can create new significance that is not understood when the episodes or stories are read alone. In particular, the corroboration of ideas between episodes gives them a special emphasis and strengthens them as a theme in the cycle.

To illustrate this, we draw on the most prominent and pervasive theme in the Elisha cycle: the prophetic power of Elisha in the form of either a miracle or a prophetic message. Each successive display of Elisha's prophetic power establishes this as the central concern of the cycle and as a fundamental aspect of Elisha's role in Israel.

Within the theme of Elisha's power, there are a number of sub-themes created through strings of adjacent episodes. The exodus allusions in the trio of episodes in 2 Kgs 2 emphasise that Elisha is a second Joshua and that he has similarities to Moses. He is the successor to Elijah and his power is inherited from him.

The juxtaposition of 2 Kgs 2:19–22 and 23–25 creates the theme of the fulfilment of Elisha's word. The fulfilment of Elisha's word is stated explicitly in these juxtaposed episodes, and then reinforced throughout the whole cycle by the repetition of miracles occurring as Elisha said they would. For example, Elisha says the widow will have oil and then it appears; he says the Shunammite will have a son and she does; he gives instruction to serve the poisoned stew and it is safe to eat. The reliability of his word is challenged in 3:4–27, and its appropriateness is challenged in 4:8–37, but overall there is a consistent emphasis on its fulfilment episode after episode.

Even if the reliability or appropriateness of Elisha's word is open to question by the audience, the necessity for obedience to his prophetic word is consistently confirmed. In almost every episode Elisha is obeyed

by those around him. The exceptions are Gehazi in 2 Kgs 5 and the commander in 2 Kgs 6:24–7:20. However, they are each subsequently punished, further confirming the fulfilment of Elisha's word and the necessity of obedience to it. The submission of the king of Israel to Elisha in the episodes in 2 Kgs 6:8–8:6 creates a theme of prophetic over royal authority, and this is further reinforced in 8:7–15 when Elisha influences the politics of Aram. Elisha is consistently obeyed both by common Israelites and by kings.

The rescue of children in 2 Kgs 4:1–7 and 8–37, the provision of food in 2 Kgs 4:38–41 and 42–44, and the threat of Aram in 2 Kgs 6:8–23 and 6:24–7:20 suggest that these were particular concerns for Elisha's ministry, especially as these themes re-emerge elsewhere in the cycle. The juxtaposition of these types of provision suggests that his miraculous powers were directed towards these particular areas.

All these characteristics of Elisha are positive, and overall most commentators read Elisha positively, despite several negative elements about him when the details are examined closely. In particular, Elisha is depicted as cruel and vengeful in 2:23–25, inaccurate and unnecessarily critical of the king in 3:4–27, and thoughtless and limited in 4:8–37. Yet these characteristics do not set the impression that remains with the reader after reading the whole Elisha cycle. Rather, readers are impressed by his prophetic authority and restorative power for Israel, in contrast with the king of Israel. The negative stories listed above are not placed adjacent to one another but are interspersed with other stories that help to correct the negative image of Elisha and to soften his weaknesses. The king is evaluated negatively in 3:1–3, so the reader is more likely to shift the blame onto him than Elisha in the next story. Similarly, the questionable success of Elisha at Shunem is surrounded by other episodes where Elisha is unambiguously powerful as a prophet.

As a further example, in the episodes in 2 Kgs 2:23–25, 5:1–27, and 6:24–7:20, Elisha causes death or illness to Israelites as punishment. If these episodes had been placed next to each other, this theme would have received more emphasis and we would be inclined to interpret it as God's punishment on Israel. Yet these episodes are separated and so there is less emphasis on the theme. There are instances where a theme could have been corroborated and highlighted by juxtaposition but instead has been more subtly placed in the cycle.

Indeed, this tendency for an improvement of the evaluation of Elisha and his ministry will be examined further to illustrate our next conclusion.

3. *Contradiction, Correction, and Complexity*

Finally, contradiction is a powerful means for shaping interpretation through juxtaposition. This is demonstrated in the story of Elisha where his good qualities tend to be reinforced through a dialogue of corroboration, and his bad qualities tend to be "corrected" or softened through a dialogue of contradiction.

In 2 Kgs 2:19–22, 23–25; 4:1–7, 8–37; 6:24–7:20; 8:1–6, and 7–15, there is a common element of danger or death to a child. Elisha's responsibility in saving or causing these deaths changes, often alternating between juxtaposed episodes. Elisha's negligence or indirect action is the cause of death for the children in 2:23–25; 4:8–37; 6:24–7:20; and in 8:7–15 he foretells the death. However, in all the intervening episodes in 2:19–22; 4:1–7, 8–37; and 8:1–6, he brings life to children or rescues them. This prevents the reader from evaluating Elisha as insensitive to the welfare of Israel's children and encourages the reader to look for a good reason for Elisha's neglect or actions. On the other hand, it forces the reader to acknowledge that the prophet brought death as well as life. The negative evaluation of Elisha is "corrected," and the positive evaluation is tempered by complexity in the purpose of his miracles and his fallibility as a prophet. This pattern of alternating positive and negative interactions with children in Israel occurs three times, and the repetition in itself makes for a theme. However, it is a complex theme, not one simply of a prophet who saves or endangers children.

A similar picture is gained when we examine Elisha's interactions with servants in 4:1–7, 8–37, 38–41, 42–44, and 5:1–27. A central feature of 4:8–37, which causes us to criticise Elisha, is that he listens to his servant Gehazi and gives the Shunammite a child against her better judgment. If this episode had been placed next to 3:4–27, it would have increased the criticism of Elisha because he would be paralleled with the negative evaluation of King Jehoram. Jehoram ought to have known that there was a prophet in Israel but had to be told by his servant. Instead, the episode is juxtaposed with 4:1–7 where Elisha rescues the widow who calls herself his servant. Listening to a servant can be a positive action of mercy and in 4:1–7 it is evaluated well. The next two episodes in 4:38–41 and 4:42–44 feature Elisha giving instructions to his servants, showing that he is no longer in the role of receiving advice from them. He is firmly in the position of master, not submissive to his own servant. Elisha's character is again redeemed in ch. 5 when he resists taking the advice of Gehazi and does not accept a gift from Naaman.

Second Kings 5 is also interesting because it contains yet another instance of a servant giving advice to a master, in this case the young Israelite servant girl to Naaman's wife in vv. 2–4. This initiates a different theme where subjects give good advice to their masters, demonstrated also when Elisha gives advice to the king of Israel in v. 8. The theme is later developed in the juxtaposed episodes in 6:8–8:15, where Elisha is constantly influencing the actions of the kings of Israel and Aram. Second Kings 5 ties these two themes together, softening a negative evaluation of Elisha in 4:7–37 and demonstrating his important role in relation to the kings.

Finally, the failure, or suspected failure, in Elisha's prophetic word recurs in 3:4–27; 4:8–37, and 13:14–19, 22–25, but these are separated by many episodes where Elisha's prophetic knowledge is confirmed, for example, in 4:1–7; 5:1–27, and chs. 6–7.

As we observe this tendency for "correcting," we draw again on Bakhtin's description of dialogue and apply it to the case before us. The voices suggesting weaknesses and failures in Elisha were not suppressed but allowed to speak clearly in the story. They add complexity to the otherwise positive picture of Elisha. He is a prophet who is powerful, but his power is not absolute. He is working for the good of Israel, but there are situations where this is broken. Elisha is imperfect, yet we are left with the impression that he was a great prophet in Israel. This gives texture and interest to the stories about him and makes the theological point that God works through a limited but powerful prophet.

4. *The Juxtaposition of Stories: The Place of the Elisha Cycle in the Book of Kings*

In has been argued in foregoing chapters that this framework for interpreting juxtaposition can be applied to whole stories and not just individual episodes. To illustrate this, we will review our interpretation of the Elisha story and then apply our methodology to the juxtaposition of the Elisha cycle with Elijah and Jehu in the book of Kings as a whole.

The episodes of the Elisha cycle in their various stages of editing present many different interpretations of Elisha, his ministry, the king, the Arameans, and Israel. Elisha's character is evaluated as both compassionate and callous, his prophetic power has the potential to bring both good and bad, the king is both a sympathetic figure and a bloodthirsty villain, he is both submissive to Elisha and set against him. There are episodes that teach morals, that legitimise Elisha, that are enigmatic

in their meaning, or even meaningless. Many of these layers of meaning are superseded, but they are not eliminated completely and so speak, even if softly, in the final form of the text. After considering the meaning of the cycle in the final form, one meaning/interpretation that is preserved throughout every arrangement and in every episode is the prophetic power of Elisha: through his miracles, his prophetic word, and the unquestioning obedience by others to this word.

Furthermore, in a reading of the cycle independently, we consider the final editorial processes worked upon it. First, the arrangement of the episodes was designed to improve the image of Elisha as one who cares for Israel. Secondly, in the final Deuteronomic editing, the notice was added in 2 Kgs 3:1–3 that Jehoram did evil in the eyes of the Lord. It is important that this editorial work occurred immediately prior to, or simultaneously with, the incorporation of the cycle into its final or near-final form because it tells us something of the final editors' interpretation.

With this reading of the episodes in their final arrangement, we now ask: What is the interpretation of the Elisha cycle in its current position in the book of Kings? Again we will answer this using our theory of juxtaposition. By looking at the stories surrounding the Elisha cycle (into which some of the Elisha episodes have even been inserted), we can determine how the final editors wished the cycle as a whole to be interpreted. The juxtaposed stories are the Elijah cycle (with other episodes concerning Ahab attached) and the narrative of Jehu's dynasty (again, with insertions concerning the southern kingdom).

a. *The Elisha Cycle Read with the Elijah Cycle*

In order to interpret the Elisha cycle in juxtaposition with the Elijah cycle, we will examine it in terms of chronological sequence: how the Elisha cycle conveys the consequences of the Elijah cycle. We will then examine the dialogue of ideas: of question and answer, contradiction, and corroboration. We will also group our interpretation around three themes central to our interpretation of the Elisha cycle in light of the Elijah cycle: delay of disaster, the presence of God through his prophet, and the number of the faithful in Israel.

(1) *Delay of disaster.* An interpretation of the Elisha cycle as a consequence of the Elijah cycle is intriguing. The Elijah cycle states explicitly the role of Elisha, and yet Elisha does not fulfil this until the end of the Elisha cycle. In 1 Kgs 19 Elisha is mentioned specifically in relation to

the slaughter of Baal worshippers, and his anointing is foretold adjacently to the rise of Jehu. Elijah himself does not perform these actions and 1 Kgs 20–22 acts as an explanation. These chapters explain that Ahab does not kill Ben-Hadad, preventing the succession, and that God has mercy on Ahab and delays the punishment against his dynasty. Elijah only appoints Elisha, so Elisha will presumably complete the tasks of Elijah.

This mission will eventually be fulfilled in the episode placed *after* the main body of the Elisha cycle, when Elisha sends a son of the prophets to anoint Jehu. It is also fulfilled to some degree when Elisha instigates Hazael's coup at the end of the cycle. Chronologically, the editor could have placed the Hazael and Jehu narrative before the other miracle stories, especially when the miracles are thought by some modern commentators to have taken place in the time of Jehu's sons, not Jehoram. There must have been an interpretive reason for placing the other miracle stories first, sandwiched between the prophecy and fulfilment.

One of the reasons that Jehu is not anointed immediately can be found in the key words of 1 Kgs 21:29, הראית כי־נכנע אחאב מלפני יען כי־נכנע מפני לא־אבי [אביא] הרעה בימיו בימי בנו אביא הרעה על־ביתו ("do you see that Ahab has humbled himself before me? I will not bring disaster in his days, in the days of his son I will bring disaster upon his house"). God delays his judgment as a result of Ahab's repentance. Proof of this delay is given in the story of Ahab's son Ahaziah in 2 Kgs 1, who, although he dies prematurely of an illness, is succeeded by another son of Ahab.

Furthermore, contrasts between Jehoram (including the nameless king in 2 Kgs 5–8 who, the story leads us to assume, is Jehoram), Ahab, and Ahaziah suggest that there is reason for a further delay of the disaster during the time of Jehoram. Whereas Ahaziah sought a prophet of Baal-zebub, Jehoram seeks Elisha in 2 Kgs 3:4–27; 6:8–23, and 6:24–7:20. The catalyst for God's promise of delay in 1 Kgs 21:29 was that Ahab tore his clothes and lay in sackcloth, in mourning. This is also the behaviour of the king in 5:7 when he acknowledges only God can solve the problem. Similarly in 7:30 he tears his clothes and is already wearing sackcloth before seeking God's prophet Elisha, albeit with threats. In these stories, the king is not exemplary and his weaknesses are clearly demonstrated to the reader. Nevertheless, there is sympathy for the actions of the king, particularly his understanding that God alone can help. This is in contrast to Ahaziah and in parallel to Ahab at the moment before God's mercy to him; and suggests the interpretation that the Elisha story is a period of delay from disaster upon Ahab's house.

The meaning of the delay can be found in the fact that, unlike Elijah or even Micaiah who foretells only evil upon Ahab and Ahaziah, Elisha works cooperatively with Jehoram, despite his various rebukes of him. In the Elisha cycle, prophet and king can work together, whereas in the Elijah cycle there is only conflict. The resolution to this tension is found in the differences between the kings explained above and the understanding that God is giving Jehoram respite. This contrast suggests that an important part of the delay is the cooperation between God's prophet and the king.

Overall, this demonstrates a dialogue of corroboration: delay comes through seeking God not Baal; and through humility before God. The Elisha cycle is interpreted as a demonstration and description of God-given respite where king and prophet can cooperate. The literary delay of the anointing of Jehu and Hazael points to the theological delay.

(2) *Presence of God in Israel through the word and miracles of his prophet*. Another key to interpreting the Elisha cycle is the parallel between the miracles in the Elijah and Elisha cycles, and the legitimation of Elisha's succession that this implies. Elijah's miracles are consistently connected to the demonstration of God's presence in Israel. The result of Elijah's miracle for the widow of Zarephath was that, in 1 Kgs 17:24, she acknowledged the word of God was in Elijah. The demonstration of Elijah's power at Carmel against the prophets of Baal revealed that the Lord is God and Elijah his servant. This is promised in 1 Kgs 18:36 and duly confirmed in 18:39. The provision of food to Elijah in 1 Kgs 19:5–9 is a direct intervention of God, and its juxtaposition with the theophany in vv. 9–18 suggests the message that God is present.

This interpretation of the miracles is corroborated in the Elisha cycle. Elisha is often referred to as "the man of God" indicating that he is God's presence in Israel. Many of the miracles confirm Elisha's word as being God's word. The provision of food is strongly connected with divine provision by parallel with the Elijah cycle. Miracles, such as making the iron axe-head float, are about reversing the laws of nature. This is also the prerogative of God, and so these miracles show his presence there.

This interpretation of the miracles corroborates the political stories where Elisha rescues Israel from Aram through miraculous means. Thus God is present in Israel and has not abandoned its king at this point. The Elisha cycle also integrates Elisha's interactions in political affairs with the lives of ordinary people and the sons of the prophets. Our interpretation is therefore that God is concerned with both kings and common people.

Just as there is a parallel between the prophetic words and powers of Elisha and Elijah, there is a contrast between the obedience of the recipients in the Elisha stories and the disobedience of Ahab to Elijah. Ahab and Jezebel disobey the prophetic word when they do not turn from the Baals after Elijah announces the drought. They are not obedient after Elijah's demonstration on Mount Carmel and reject his miracle. Furthermore, Ahab does not submit to the instructions of the unnamed prophet in 1 Kgs 20, and so his life will be taken. By contrast, the Israelites and even the king in the Elisha cycle are repeatedly obedient to Elisha's word and miracles in the episodes. The contrast blackens Ahab's sins and simultaneously highlights the obedience of the recipients of Elisha's miracles, including the kings. This leads us to the next theme, whether Elijah alone was left among the faithful.

(3) *"I alone am left."* Within the Elijah cycle there is a dialogue about whether Elijah alone still worships God. On the one hand, Elijah declares in 1 Kgs 18:22 that he is the only prophet of God left. On the other hand, Obadiah tells him in 18:13 that he has hidden one hundred prophets of the Lord in caves. In 18:39 the people bow down and acknowledge the Lord as God. Then, in 19:10 and 14 Elijah says that the Israelites have ravaged God's covenant, altars, and prophets and that only he is left. He does not state explicitly whether he is the only one left among the worshippers of God, or just among his prophets, but both are possible and are in tension with the words of the people and Obadiah. Finally, God affirms Elijah's despair by saying that the Baal worshippers will be destroyed. However, he says 7,000 will be left, implying Elijah was not alone but was among this number. This dialogue is made more complex because Elijah does not fulfil the command of God to anoint Jehu and Hazael immediately. Furthermore, 1 Kgs 20:15 ambiguously suggests that there are only 7,000 Israelites anyway, possibly making the command void. At the beginning of the Elisha cycle, the audience is still searching for these answers: Are there any faithful left in Israel apart from Elijah? And will God bring destruction to the Baal worshippers such that only 7,000 Israelites are left?

The Elisha cycle corroborates the depiction of many faithful in Israel and contradicts Elijah's belief that he was alone. The repeated appearance of the sons of the prophets and the absence of prophets of any other gods suggest that there are prophets of the Lord in Israel. Elisha's miracles demonstrate compassion on the people of Israel and show implicitly that they believed in God—the same way the prophet performed miracles for the king when he acknowledged God.

God's generosity through Elisha towards the people of Israel suggests an answer for why the Israelites are not being destroyed. Israel on the whole *are* characterised as worshipping God, not Baal. Perhaps Israel has already been purged and Elisha is blessing the remaining 7,000.

A further corroboration between the two cycles is that God's presence is observed by outsiders as well as by Israelites, and this contrasts with certain individual Israelites. The widow of Zarephath, the Shunammite, and Naaman are among the very few who make declarations about Elijah and Elisha, and they are all foreigners. These demonstrations of piety are in contrast to the Israelites in the Elijah cycle, Elisha in the Shunammite episode, and Gehazi in the Naaman episode, who are all shown to have faults. These imperfections in Israel will also be important when we examine what is juxtaposed after the Elisha cycle.

b. *The Elisha Cycle Read with the Story of Jehu's Dynasty*

It is difficult to define the limits of the story following the Elisha cycle because episodes from the Elisha cycle are interspersed with it, as are episodes about the southern kingdom of Israel. Furthermore, Jehu's dynasty continues until 15:12, when Shallum conspires against Zechariah and the four generations of his dynasty are complete. We will concentrate on the northern kings until the end of ch. 13 but keep in mind that this juxtaposed story is not well defined and that it also includes notes about the southern kingdom.

First of all, the chronological sequence is broken in 2 Kgs 8:16, the beginning of the new story according to our division. The slaughter of Ahab's sons in ch. 10 evidently occurred after 8:7–15, because Hazael is now king. However, we are not encouraged to interpret the slaughter as the consequence of the Elisha cycle because, for the most part, the kings are not named in the Elisha cycle and may not necessarily be in the line of Ahab. On the other hand, the end of Ahab's line makes it clear that ch. 10 follows chronologically from the story before the Elisha cycle and, in particular, it is a consequence of 1 Kgs 19. This is emphasised throughout by repeatedly referring to the word of Elijah and the sins of Ahab and Jezebel. We will examine the interpretation of the Elisha cycle in light of the same three themes as earlier.

(1) *Delay of disaster*. The idea that the Elisha cycle is a period of delay from a disaster against the king of Israel is first confirmed by the anointing of Jehu, which fulfils 1 Kgs 19 and draws us back to Elijah's prophecies against Ahab. The chronological sequence with the Elijah cycle and the constant references to it emphasise that this is its fulfilment. Thus it is confirmed that the Elisha cycle is an interlude of respite. The

final editing by the Deuteronomist(s) on the Elisha cycle probably involved the insertion of 2 Kgs 3:1–3, which gives a negative evaluation of Jehoram and blackens his depiction in the following episode. It follows that there was an intention to show that the punishment of Ahab's house was still warranted and expected, despite the sympathetic portrait of the unnamed king of Israel elsewhere in the cycle. It was a delay of punishment, not a removal of it.

Moreover, there is a parallel between the house of Ahab and the house of Jehu that further corroborates the theme of the delay of judgment against the house of the king. In 2 Kgs 10:29–31 it is reported that Jehu sinned by keeping the golden calves, despite removing the Baals. As punishment, only four generations of his descendants would stay on the throne. Similar to Ahab, he would not be stripped of the throne, but there would be a delay until another coup. This parallel between Jehu and Ahab highlights that delay of disaster is a theme in this part of the book of Kings. It is therefore a key to the interpretation of the Elisha cycle, which is sandwiched between these two stories.

(2) *Presence of God in Israel through the word and miracles of his prophet.* The miracles and foresight of Elijah and Elisha confirm the divine origin of their word; and therefore the confirmation of God's presence in Israel. This idea is corroborated in the story of Jehu when Elijah's word is continually confirmed. However, as Elijah is now dead and Elisha is barely mentioned in the Jehu story, God's direct presence through a prophet is diminishing.

There are no miracles for ordinary people in this story, and this difference highlights that the period of relief in the time of Elisha is now over. There are many attacks by the Arameans, just as there were during the ministry of Elisha, but, for the most part, the Arameans are successful, and Israel is ravaged by Hazael and his son Ben-Hadad.

However, there are two glimpses of what it was like in the time of Elisha's main period of ministry. Key to Elisha's help against the Arameans was his cooperation with the king of Israel, who is portrayed sympathetically but as flawed. These ideas are corroborated in this story. First, King Jehoahaz, although evaluated as doing evil in the eyes of the Lord, pleads to God for mercy in 2 Kgs 13:4. In response, God sends an unnamed deliverer and they are freed from Aram. Secondly, Elisha, on his deathbed, tells Joash that he will strike the Arameans three times but will not annihilate them. After the resurrection of a man from Elisha's tomb, Israel is surprisingly successful in defeating the Arameans completely. This suggests that God is present once again through his (dead) prophet and that he brings mercy on Israel.

Despite these parallels, the picture in this story is marred by the death of Elisha without any prophetic succession. The phrase "my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen" recalls the succession of Elisha to Elijah, except now there is no one to succeed Elisha. Throughout the Elisha cycle, the prophet repeatedly rescues Israel from Aram, but now there is a promise that Israel will be spared only two more times. The sparseness of God's active presence through miracles in the Jehu story highlights by contrast its intensity in the Elisha cycle.

(3) *"I alone am left."* The other fulfilment of 1 Kgs 19 in the Jehu narrative is that there is a slaughter of Baal worshippers among the Israelites as a result of the actions of Jehu. This completes the dialogue in the Elijah cycle about whether Elijah was alone among the worshippers of God in Israel, and whether the number of Israel had already been reduced to 7,000 on account of this. Although the end of the Elijah cycle and the absence of idolatry in the Elisha cycle suggested that no slaughter of Baal worshippers would now be necessary, the Jehu narrative demonstrates that there were many who served Baal in Israel and they were killed accordingly.

The death of Elisha coincides with the fulfilment of Elijah's prophecy, the end of the house of Ahab, and the destruction of the worshippers of Baal. This suggests that these events are the climax and the purpose of Elisha's ministry. It also corroborates 1 Kgs 19 where this purpose is made explicit. However, it contradicts the Elisha cycle itself where Elisha is more concerned with restoration and bringing life than with foreboding judgment. He does not attempt to "convert" Israel but rather there is a picture of general worship of God throughout the cycle. The destruction of the Baal worshippers raises our awareness of elements of faithlessness among the Israelites, which can be perceived among the many voices in the Elisha cycle: the youths who insult Elisha and are subsequently taken by bears; his servant Gehazi who compares unfavourably to Naaman and gives Elisha bad advice concerning a son for the Shunammite woman; Elisha himself who is flawed in his dealings with the Shunammite; and then, by contrast, the foreigners Naaman and the Shunammite woman who acknowledge God's presence. Like the king, who is sympathetically portrayed but will ultimately receive punishment, so the Israelites receive both mercy and punishment. The theme of the delay of disaster now extends to the people, not just to Ahab's dynasty. The Elisha story suggests the picture is not so bleak; but the story juxtaposed afterwards adjusts this to imply that Israel needs cleansing of its worship of other gods and will be diminished first by Jehu and then by Hazael.

In summary, the Elijah cycle and the Jehu story have a significant effect on our interpretation of the Elisha cycle. Although there are many voices, messages, and lessons in the Elisha story, three themes are present across all three of these juxtaposed stories, and so they ought to form the focus of our interpretation.

First, these stories demonstrate that the Elisha cycle represents a period of respite and delay before the impending judgment against the house of Ahab. The Jehu story functions explicitly as a continuation of Elijah's campaign against Ahab's dynasty, and the insertion of the Elisha story between the prophecy and fulfilment illustrates the merciful delay resulting from Ahab's repentance. Although Jehoram at times resembles the penitent Ahab, this points to the continuation and maintenance of the delay, not the possibility of a full reprieve.

Secondly, this respite from judgment is a period of God's presence in Israel, as demonstrated by Elisha's miracles. This is highlighted by the parallel to the miracles of Elijah and by the comparative absence of prophetic activity in the course of the Jehu story. The purpose of Elisha's ministry was not to "convert" Israel because the king and the Israelites overall are characterised as faithful and obedient to the prophet. Rather, the presence of God is a positive picture of his blessing during the respite, even if it will soon be withdrawn because there is no prophetic succession.

Finally, the Elisha story corroborates that there *were* faithful Israelites remaining and demonstrates God's mercy towards them through deliverance from hunger and the Aramean threats. Elijah was not alone and there is now hope for the 7,000 faithful. The focus upon the remnant of faithful Israelites, with only hints of their imperfections, is in contrast to the focus on Baal worshippers in the Elijah and Jehu stories. God is blessing the faithful, even if the violent purging of the unfaithful is still to come.

5. *Final Words*

Attention to the juxtaposition of episodes and stories in biblical narrative, including the Elisha cycle, points to how the editors of the final form wished each episode/narrative to be interpreted. It explains why our final text contains many voices that have been retained by the final editors. Yet they have been shaped at various stages to suit various intentions, to maximise the desired meaning, and minimise the opposing voices.

This work has gone beyond merely asserting that interpreters should observe the juxtaposed episodes or stories when analysing a text. We have proposed a framework for looking for connections between the

episodes, determining whether they are chronological or not, and identifying features in the text that indicate this. We have also looked at which features in the text draw attention to parallels, contrasts, and themes between the adjacent narratives. Finally, using elements from the literary theory of Bakhtin, we have proposed a way of understanding how the episodes interact with one another, and why bringing together two narratives, which may have come from different authors, contexts, and times, can create new meaning. It demonstrates that juxtaposition is a powerful way of creating meaning because it retains old voices and simultaneously creates new ones. Thus it can also be a powerful tool in our interpretation and understanding of the biblical narratives.

Finally, our extended case study on the Elisha cycle shows that the application of this methodology produces creative, compelling, and well-founded new interpretations of the biblical text. Juxtaposition is a well-known feature of biblical narrative, and this is by no means the first time its effect on interpretation has been observed or appreciated. However, the detail and sophisticated theoretical awareness of our methodology has produced a fresh reading that is both thorough and nuanced in its assertions. Furthermore, the success of this methodology offers potential for its development for reading other types of juxtaposition in the Bible, beyond that of narrative units. This includes the juxtaposition of units in poetic, prophetic, or wisdom literature, of whole books in the canonical arrangements of different religious traditions, and of characters and plot lines juxtaposed within single stories. Most especially, the same methodology can be applied in literary and theological readings of other biblical narratives to expand our understanding of these intricate and meaning-laden texts.

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